Making a difference, promoting gender equality? Transforming childcare policies for mothers, fathers and children in Wales.

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Making a Difference, Promoting Gender Equality? Transforming Childcare Policies for Mothers, Fathers and Children in Wales.

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Submitted to the University of Wales in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of PhD in Sociology

Swansea University

2006

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SUMMARY

This thesis explores the connections between childcare, gender relations and social policy in post-devolution Wales. The changing childcare policy landscape in the United Kingdom is discussed and the making of childcare policy in Wales following devolution is traced. New Labour parenting and childcare policy agendas are assessed in relation to claims that policy will progress gender equality, offer parental choice, extend support to parents and meet the interests of children. Following analysis of policy texts, the assessment proceeds with reference to interviews with policy actors, presenting their perspectives on policy delivery in Wales. The degree to which a distinctive social policy agenda has been enabled by devolution is discussed. It is argued that there *is* evidence of a different style and vision in Wales that may provide opportunities for social movements. Guided by feminist standpoint theory and 'institutional ethnography', the study then turns to the childcare practices of mothers, fathers and grandmothers living in Swansea. The main focus is on the *mothers'* accounts, how their caring practices are shaped by gendered moral codes and ideologies relating to the conduct of mothering. Key concepts used throughout the analysis include 'sensitive mothering' (Walkerdine and Lucey, 1989) and 'intensive mothering' (Hays, 1996); 'gendered moral rationalities' (Duncan and Edwards, 1999) and 'social/ emotional capital' (Reay, 2005). Nancy Fraser's (1997) discussion of claims for 'redistribution' and for 'recognition' is used to highlight tensions in policy agendas, gender politics and parental preferences. In conclusion the importance of developing a feminist 'ethics of care' in childcare/ parenting policy is discussed. It is argued that childcare policy in Wales has been limited by a narrow understanding of the connections between parental preference, gender and childcare and the interconnections between informal care provided through gendered networks of social support and formal childcare provision need to be recognised.

DECLARATION AND STATEMENTS

DECLARATION

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

Signed ..... (candidate)

Date .....

STATEMENT 1

This thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. Where correction services have been used, the extent and nature of the correction is clearly marked in a footnote(s).

Other sources are acknowledged by endnotes giving explicit references. A full list of references is appended.

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STATEMENT 2

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CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am very grateful to Professor Nickie Charles, my supervisor, for her support and encouragement over the last four years. I would also like to thank Dr Charlotte Davies, my second supervisor, for her advice and feedback on my work; and Dr Lisa Smyth, who organised an excellent postgraduate programme during my first year. Thanks are also due to the University of Wales Swansea for the award of a postgraduate bursary for three years.

Many people have kindly given up their time to participate in this research. I would like to thank all the mothers, fathers and grandparents for sharing their personal experiences with me. I am also indebted to the policy actors at the regional level in Wales and locally in Swansea and the practitioners in local early years and childcare services for their participation despite heavy workloads.

Finally, and most importantly, my love and thanks go to my family: my husband, Darryl Davies and our children, Nicholas (11) and Christopher (6). The children have even taken an interest, frequently breaking into the study to ask me "how are you getting on, mum?" I would also like to remember my father, Fred Ball, and my mother, Mavis Ball, who are both sadly missed by all of us.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CIS	Children's Information Service
CWG	Childcare Working Group
DfEE	Department for Education and Employment
DSS	Department of Social Security
DTI	Department of Trade and Industry
EOC	Equal Opportunities Commission
EU	European Union
EYDCP	Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership
MEWN	Minority Ethnic Women's Network
NAfW	National Assembly for Wales
NCSTF	National Childcare Strategy Task Force
NESS	National Evaluation of Sure Start
UK	United Kingdom
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
USA	United States of America
WAG	Welsh Assembly Government

INTRODUCTION

This research seeks to illuminate the connections between childcare, gender relations and social policy in Wales using feminist standpoint theory and 'institutional ethnography' (Smith, 1988) to get to the heart of mothers' and fathers' everyday caring practices. Whilst childcare 'is not generally understood to be a glamorous or exciting topic' (Vincent and Ball, 2001: 633), this is surprising for it is an arena that goes directly to questions of political economy, gender and welfare rights. It should be an issue for all those with an interest in feminist politics and the promotion of gender equality, yet has often been neglected in these circles (Franzway *et al*, 1989; Randall, 1996a; 1996b). Childcare is an issue about which I feel passionately for the transition to motherhood brought home the degree to which women continue to be regulated by institutional relations of ruling (Smith, 1988). The shaping of my chosen sociological problem by biographical factors will be explained in Chapter Two.

Since the launch of the National Childcare Strategy (DfEE, 1998) by the New Labour Government, public and academic interest in childcare has become more pronounced (Ball and Vincent, 2005; Daycare Trust, 2003; Duncan *et al*, 2004; Lewis, 2003). This research offers a further contribution to an understanding of the changing childcare policy landscape in the United Kingdom (UK). The study seeks to be distinctive in two respects. First, with regard to the selection of post-devolution Wales as the 'gendered welfare regime' (Brush, 2002) that is the location for the research. Second, in regard to the application of a conceptual framework rooted in feminist standpoint theory and 'institutional ethnography' to link local social relations, gender and childcare policy. The research seeks to elucidate the prospects

for pursuing a feminist policy and research agenda that respects the everyday worlds of mothers, fathers and children in their diversity, yet challenges gender inequalities and the failure of policy to engage with an 'ethics of care' (F.Williams, 2001). These interests shape the central research questions:

- How does childcare policy interact with gender relations?

- What can we learn from the application of 'feminist critical policy analysis' to a reading of policy texts on childcare and related agendas?

- What scope does devolution offer for the making of distinctive social policy and a reshaping of the gender regime in Wales?

- How do regional and local policy actors interpret childcare policy and related agendas? How does this connect with wider political values such as equality, justice and rights?

- How do mothers and fathers 'do childcare' in the context of their daily lives and local social relations and how are their childcare practices shaped by ideologies, discourses, material conditions and institutional structures?

- How do feminist standpoint theory and the method of 'institutional ethnography' illuminate 'who is benefiting and who not from existing care policies' (F.Williams, 2001: 487)? How does this connect to differences based on social class, ethnicity, family circumstances and geographical location?

- What needs to change in order for childcare policy to be 'gender-sensitive'? How should policy engage with the concept of care and with the advancement of feminist claims for 'redistribution' and 'recognition' (Fraser, 1997)?

The research was conducted in three areas of Swansea with contrasting socio-economic profiles and a map of local childcare services was developed through visits to relevant agencies. In addition to analysis of national, regional and local policy texts, interviews were conducted with regional and local policy actors. Interviews with mothers and a smaller sample of fathers and grandparents were arranged in each area and involved the recording of childcare 'life histories'.

The thesis is structured in the following way:

Chapter One introduces my conceptual framework with regard to three areas of literature. First, feminist standpoint theory is discussed with particular reference to the contribution of Dorothy Smith (1988). Second, the social construction of motherhood is explored with reference to the ideologies of 'sensitive mothering' (Walkerdine and Lucey, 1989) and 'intensive mothering' (Hays, 1996). The relevance of 'gendered moral rationalities' (Duncan and Edwards, 1999) and the development of 'social capital' and of 'emotional capital' (Gillies, 2005; Reay, 2005) in mothers' daily caring practices are highlighted. The place of fathers and children in the moral economy of care is discussed briefly. Third, I consider feminist perspectives on gender, care and the welfare state.

Chapter Two discusses the research methodology and the conduct of feminist research on childcare policy and caring practices. In Section One I discuss the autobiographical influences on the research. In Section Two I describe how I researched childcare practices from a feminist standpoint using the method of 'institutional ethnography' (Smith, 1988). I also explain my approach to the analysis of policy texts through feminist critical policy analysis (Marshall, 1997; 2000) and the utilisation of the concepts of 'framing' (Benford and Snow, 2000), 'condensation symbols' (Edelman, 1964) and the 'discursive opportunity structure' (Ferree, 2003). In Section Three I discuss the selection of research methods, sampling and the three local case study areas. In Section Four I offer a reflexive account of my interviews with mothers, illustrating how some of the methodological challenges helped me to better understand mothering as an institution, social practice and source of identity.

Chapter Three examines family, parenting and childcare policy at national level since the election of New Labour in 1997. In Section One I introduce the National Childcare Strategy (DfEE, 1998) and link it to a range of other policy agendas. In Section Two I evaluate policy with regard to its implications for gender relations and for supporting parents. In Section Three I identify some questions for further investigation emerging from the policy review.

Chapter Four turns to policy agendas in Wales following devolution and the creation of the National Assembly for Wales (NAfW) in 1999. The chapter pursues the question of how far there is scope for doing things differently in Wales with reference to the making of childcare policy. In Section One I assess the Assembly's

commitment to the key political values of equality, social justice and inclusion, and children's rights. In Section Two I reconstruct the making of childcare policy in Wales in relation to these political values. In the conclusion I assess claims that Wales has been able to create a distinctive social policy agenda.

Chapter Five is based on an analysis of the interviews with regional and local policy actors. The regional and local policy regimes are discussed separately but in relation to three common themes. First, policy actors' perspectives on devolution, the role of the Assembly and opportunities for creating 'made in Wales' policies. Secondly, understandings of childcare policy, its connection with other policy agendas and key political values. Thirdly, views on issues of childcare policy delivery, achievements and challenges. These perspectives help to point to some of the disconnections in policy.

Chapter Six discusses the interviews with mothers about their daily caring practices, the social relations of care and their shaping through material and emotional concerns. The main focus is on the *mothers'* accounts as my primary interest was on the social conditions of motherhood and the implications of this for the conduct of childcare and gender relations. A variety of themes emerged from these accounts that are analysed with reference to 'gendered moral rationalities' (Duncan and Edwards, 1999), 'sensitive/ intensive mothering' (Hays, 1996; Walkerdine and Lucey, 1989) and the importance of access to social and emotional capital (Edwards and Gillies, 2005). The accounts of the fathers and grandparents are discussed later in this chapter in order to illuminate further the interaction of gender, care and social support.

Chapter Seven continues to focus on the interviews with mothers and the smaller sample of fathers and grandparents with reference to their use of local childcare and early years services. The degree to which services meet the needs of parents and the tension between targeted services and the case for universal childcare (Land, 2002a) is discussed. In Section One the three case study areas are described in regard to service provision. In Section Two parents' use of formal childcare services is examined and I illustrate that this can be better understood in relation to the availability of local networks of social support and informal care. In Section Three the wider range of services used by and needed by parents beyond childcare are discussed. The socio-spatial inequalities of provision that have resulted from the creation of a childcare market are illustrated forcefully.

Chapter Eight is the concluding chapter. In Section One I provide a review of the main findings and point to the tensions between mothers' preferences and childcare policy. In Section Two the responses of policy actors to evidence that policy is failing to meet the needs of parents are presented. I argue that although policy actors may be 'captured by the discourse' (Bowe *et al*, 1994) in their understanding of childcare policy, they were also aware of tensions and gaps. In Section Three I will offer some final thoughts on how gender-sensitive chidcare policy may be achieved in relation to debates on developing an ethics of care and the integration of feminist claims for redistribution and recognition.

Throughout the thesis I address questions relating to Nancy Fraser's (1997; 2001) discussion of political struggles for economic and cultural justice in terms of claims for 'redistribution' and claims for 'recognition':

> On one side stand the proponents of 'redistribution'. Drawing on long traditions of egalitarian, labor and socialist organizing, political actors aligned with this orientation seek a more just allocation of resources and goods. On the other side stand the proponents of 'recognition'. Drawing on newer visions of a 'difference-friendly' society, they seek a world where assimilation to majority or dominant cultural norms is no longer the price of equal respect. (Fraser, 2001: 21)

This is the distinction between political claims for *equality* and political claims for respecting *difference*. However, in practice when we assess the status of particular claims, it can be difficult to maintain this distinction. This is especially so in relation to claims that bridge the divide between the public and the private such as those relating to care. Are claims for extended maternity leave to enable mothers time to care, time to recover and the opportunity to breastfeed, claims for a redistribution of resources (time and financial support) or claims for recognition that the needs of women will at times be different from those of men? It has been increasingly acknowledged that the distinction may be difficult to uphold and Fraser (2001) regrets the polarization in politics between those who emphasise one or the other. I agree with Fraser (2001) that claims for redistribution and recognition must be integrated. Some of these tensions are evident in relation to childcare policy and policy actors may disagree over how the organization and delivery of childcare can meet 'redistribution' or 'recognition' claims, or do both.

CHAPTER ONE

PERSPECTIVES ON FAMILY PRACTICES, THE CARE OF CHILDREN AND THE WELFARE STATE

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I develop the conceptual framework for the thesis. The chapter is divided into three sections through which I seek a way of connecting the daily childcare practices of families with the 'relations of ruling' (Smith, 1988) embedded within social policy and the welfare state. First, I introduce feminist standpoint theory with particular attention to the work of Dorothy Smith (1988; 1990a; 1990b; 1997). Second, I explore how understandings of motherhood are socially constructed through a moral economy of care (McDowell *et al*, 2005) shaped by the ideologies of 'sensitive mothering' (Walkerdine and Lucey, 1989) and 'intensive mothering' (Hays, 1996). Particular attention will be paid to the significance of 'gendered moral rationalities' (Duncan and Edwards, 1999) and the development of 'social capital' and 'emotional capital' (Gillies, 2005; Reay, 2000; 2005) in how families organise the care of children. Social constructions of fatherhood and childhood are also considered briefly in this section. Third, I discuss feminist perspectives on the welfare state, gender and care with particular reference to the literature on welfare state and gender regimes (Lewis, 1992; Orloff, 1993; Sainsbury, 1994) and on citizenship (Lister, 1997; 2001). I also consider feminist political action in relation to care as claims for 'recognition' and 'redistribution' (Fraser, 1997). In the conclusion

I will introduce claims that we should develop an 'ethics of care' within social policy (Sevenhuijsen, 2002; F.Williams, 2001).

SECTION ONE: EXPLORING FAMILY PRACTICES FROM A FEMINIST STANDPOINT.

This research emerged from the interconnections between my professional work as a sociologist, my commitment to feminist politics and my experience as a mother. At the heart of my intentions was an interest in finding out how other mothers felt about and went about childcare in the context of changing policy in this sphere and how far feminist theory could speak to our experience and need for support. Consequently the research started from *mothers'* accounts of their daily lives in relation to care of children and this was guided by feminist standpoint theory. Feminist standpoint theory has the capacity to do justice to difference and diversity among women but also serves to illuminate the deep structures and ideologies surrounding mothering and caring overall (McKie *et al*, 2001; McMahon, 1995; Phoenix *et al*, 1991; Richardson, 1993). Feminist standpoint theory also highlights the impact of gender on family practices with implications for fathers, children and wider kinship networks. Hence, this is not a theory that is confined to women's experience but I do follow Smith (1988) in *beginning with* how mothers interpret their lives.

In utilising feminist standpoint epistemology, I have been particularly convinced by the approach articulated in the work of Dorothy Smith (1988; 1990a; 1990b; 1997). Whilst there are competing understandings of what feminist standpoint represents (Hekman, 1997; Maynard, 1994), it is generally agreed that its advocates value

reflexivity in the research enterprise and that they are involved in a project that is intrinsically political, in the creation of 'a counterhegemonic discourse' (Hartsock, 1997: 367). Feminist standpoint may thus be seen as located within a broader tradition of critical theory and critical research (Connolly, 1996). Standpoint theory is:

> .... an approach that argues that knowledge is and should be situated in people's diverse social locations. As such, all knowledge is affected by the social conditions under which it is produced; it is grounded in both the social location and the social biography of the observer and the observed. (Mann and Kelley, 1997: 392)

Furthermore, standpoint theory is concerned with the relationship between knowledge, power and inequalities (Hartsock, 1997; Collins, 1997) and grew out of a concern to understand women's experiences from a feminist perspective that could challenge the knowledge produced by men (Maynard, 1994). The evolution of standpoint theory since the publication in 1986 of Sandra Harding's *The Science Question in Feminism* has generated considerable debate about the nature of feminist knowledge and the capacity of theory to respect diversity and difference. In an issue of *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* (1997) there was a debate on feminist standpoint theory in response to a critique by Susan Hekman (1997). Some of these contributions provide a context for my understanding of this approach.

The emergence of standpoint theory must be placed within the context of the growth of the women's movement, as Smith explains:

> ...those who have been identified with "feminist" standpoint theory became active in working with other women in our fields to undermine social science's embedding of the standpoint of white men as hidden agent and subject. Its distinctively experiential methodology was only a systematization of a political methodology that had been foundational to the women's movement. (1997: 394)

Whilst Smith draws attention to the roots of standpoint theory in the women's movement, Nancy Hartsock (1997) wishes to remind readers of its roots in Marxist theory. She explains that in her early contribution to the development of standpoint theory [i]she had been seeking 'to translate the concept of the standpoint of the proletariat into feminist terms' (Hartsock, 1997: 368). This was because 'women's lives in Western capitalist societies also contained possibilities for developing a critique of domination.' (Hartsock, 1997: 368). However, she acknowledges that at this point she failed to consider differences between women in developing a standpoint that could understand the complexity of power relations.

Since the early development of feminist standpoint theory there has been increasing recognition that women have widely different experiences. There are multiple sources of oppression and critics point out that some feminist scholarship has been limited by a tendency to assume that the problems facing white, middle class women are universal (Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1983; Archer, 2004). Many black feminists, for example, have claimed that much feminist knowledge is itself ethnocentric and does not speak to the experiences of black women (Bhavnani and Phoenix, 1994; Carby,1982; Collins, 2000; Ramazanoglu, 1986). These claims should not lead us to reject feminist standpoint theory altogether or to suggest there are unlimited standpoints with equal claims to being seen as true. As Maynard argues 'Although it may be tempting to regard each standpoint as equally valid, this may be difficult

when the power relations between women themselves differ' (1994: 20). Moreover, it is important to look beyond identity politics and to take hold of those areas where women continue to face common concerns (Archer, 2004). I share Hartsock's view that the role of standpoint theory should be to understand power relations as a basis for achieving social justice. As part of this project it was important to look beyond the experiences and perspectives of individuals to systems of domination at the macro-level:

> The focus is on the macroprocesses of power, those that, although they may be played out in individual lives, can be fully understood only at the level of society as a whole. (Hartsock, 1997: 371)

Whilst my starting point in this research was to encourage mothers to present their personal perspectives on childcare and to respect the diversity of viewpoints and circumstances, I go beyond documenting multiple standpoints on mothering. My interest is in drawing on the accounts of the mothers as they see their social world in order to understand how social structures and unjust social relations extend their grip and hence identify what will need to change if equality and justice are to be achieved. Whilst learning from the experiences of women in their diversity must form part of a feminist standpoint, I do not see women's standpoint as being synonymous with a feminist standpoint, although in some of the literature this distinction is not maintained (Maynard, 1994).

Smith explains her understanding of the distinction between women's standpoint and a feminist standpoint in response to what she argues is a misinterpretation of her approach by Hekman (1997):

> I am not proposing a *feminist standpoint* at all; taking up women's standpoint as I have developed it is not at all the same thing and has nothing to do with justifying feminist knowledge. (1997: 393)

Smith's intention is not to privilege women's experience as superior and providing a foundation to feminist knowledge although she acknowledges that some variants of standpoint theory may be understood in this way, leading to critiques of essentialism and universalising tendencies. Rather, Smith is proposing a *methodology* that begins from women's experience in order to understand its *social* character:

> ....it is to recognize that concepts are also in actuality and that the objectifications of what I early on described as the relations of ruling are themselves people's socially organized practices in the actual locations of their lives. (1997: 393)

Smith contests Hekman's claims that she celebrates women's knowledge as being better than the conceptual understandings of the sociologist. She is not rejecting sociological concepts in preference for the reality of women speaking for themselves. As Mann and Kelley explain in their interpretation of Smith's work 'it is the social location that holds the key to greater understanding of the relations of ruling, not the fact that the knowledge producer is a woman or a member of an oppressed group' (1997: 397). Rather Smith is seeking to develop a feminist sociology that builds on the everyday world:

> Though women are indeed the expert practitioners of their everyday worlds, the notion of the everyday world as problematic assumes that disclosure of the extra local determinations of our experience does not lie within the scope of everyday practices. We can see only so much without specialized investigation, and the latter should be the sociologist's special business. (1988: 161)

The sociologist has a role to play in exposing how social injustice and oppressive social structures may be played out in our daily lives. Smith's (1988) proposal that

we use the method of 'institutional ethnography' to explore the everyday worlds of women and to create a sociology for women has played a major role in my approach to research. Her view is that in developing a feminist standpoint we need to start from women's everyday experiences and these will often call attention to the private realm of home, family and domestic life. However, the method of 'institutional ethnography' goes beyond documenting women's daily lives. The aim is to explore how mundane activities that we take for granted are shaped by wider social processes and how those activities simultaneously support the relations of ruling. Smith explains her understanding of ruling relations in the following way:

> When I write of "ruling" in this context I am identifying a complex of organized practices, including government, law, business and financial management, professional organization, and educational institutions as well as the discourses in texts that interpenetrate the multiple sites of power. (1988: 3)

The focus is on how individual practices are 'socially organised' through this variety of 'institutions organizing and regulating society' (Smith, 1988: 3) and which impact on forms of consciousness. In this way we can move to an understanding of how we are constrained by the relations of ruling as we go about our business. The accounts of the mothers that I interviewed support claims that for many of them these relations are taken for granted although how they are experienced varies across dimensions of social class, ethnic origin, and family circumstances.

Smith bases the method of 'institutional ethnography' on three main elements. First, analyses of how research participants draw on 'institutional ideologies' to make sense of their experiences. These ideologies serve to obscure certain social processes. As Smith explains: 'Institutional ideologies are acquired by members as methods of

analyzing experiences located in the work process of the institution' (1988: 161). Smith provides the example of professional training for teachers who learn to interpret pupil behaviour through the lens of educational discourses that are tied into wider relations of ruling. Second, Smith calls for a broad understanding of 'work' that goes beyond what is generally understood by that term:

> By locating institutional ethnography in the work people do we are not concerned so much to mark a distinction between what is work and what is not work, but rather to deploy a concept that will return us to the actualities of what people do on a day-to-day basis under definite conditions and in definite situations. (1988: 166)

This approach will acknowledge caring practices as *work* and will illuminate how those caring practices are tied into wider institutional processes such as those surrounding paid work and education. Mothers interpret their role through particular institutional ideologies and associated discourses, meaning the work of mothering is socially organised, yet this is obscured, being presented as 'natural'. This will be examined further in Section Two with reference to the ideologies of 'sensitive' and 'intensive' mothering. Smith also builds on a Foucauldian understanding of the role of discourse as being 'textually mediated' (Smith, 1988; 1990b) and this too is useful with regard to understanding the conduct of mothering. There is an enormous variety of texts (state policies, childcare advice manuals, television programmes and parenting advice web-sites) produced by 'experts' and directed towards parents. Their role in shaping particular visions of appropriate childcare ties in with understandings of 'good mothering'. Third, Smith uses the concept of 'social relation' to link the 'work' of participants to wider social structures. Smith explains further with reference to Marx:

> Marx's analysis, both in this passage from the *Grundrisse* and in *Capital*, locates the determination of people's lives beyond and outside the places where they confront one another directly in the same local settings. Their relations in the local setting are organized elsewhere. The conditions of their action and experience are organized by relations external to the everyday world and beyond the power of individuals to control. (1988: 95)

In order to illustrate the method of institutional ethnography Smith examines how the work of mothering supports the work process of schooling. Schools are reliant on and take for granted many of the tasks that mothers perform on a daily basis. This will include tasks as varied as ensuring children arrive at school on time to baking cakes for the school fete. However, 'the interpretive practices rendering mothering accountable in this context do not identify it as work' (Smith, 1988: 168). This provides an example of how wider institutional policies and discourses impact on the work of mothering and how this regulates what mothers do in caring for their children. At the same time the work that mothers put in to supporting the school makes it possible for the schools to function efficiently. This conceptual framework seemed to offer a way forward for my research in view of my interest in how the daily activities involved in caring for children are shaped by policies. Indeed, I see childcare policies as part of the network of 'relations of ruling' as they are forged by economic and educational priorities. Childcare policies serve to meet these priorities whilst simultaneously claiming their role is to meet parental needs.

Whilst Smith (1988) is concerned to develop a sociology which gives voice to women she also argues that this will not be enough to confound the 'relations of ruling'. Jane Ribbens takes up this theme when she considers insider/ outsider analyses in relation to feminist research:

> How are we to conceptualise women's lives in ways that both value women's perspectives within the private sphere yet also allow for critical insights from the outside? (1994: 33)

Her position was to combine 'insider' and 'outsider' perspectives in order to take women's accounts seriously but also to locate them within a wider analytic framework. I have tried to achieve this approach in my analyses by giving space to the mothers' accounts and then interpreting them through the feminist standpoint framework offered by Smith (1988) and others.

In her contribution to the debate in *Signs*, Patricia Hill Collins highlights the role standpoint theory may play in understanding power relations and points out:

> standpoint theory places less emphasis on individual experiences within socially constructed groups than on the social conditions that construct such groups. (1997: 375)

This provides one way in for my analysis of the mothers' accounts. It is the social conditions and discourses of motherhood that frame the decisions that the mothers make. In addition, discourses relating to fatherhood and childhood will also shape family practices. These may change over time and place, and the place of individuals within socially constructed groups and their material circumstances will mean those conditions/ discourses have a differential impact. In the next section I explore these social conditions and discourses in more depth.

SECTION TWO: THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF PARENTHOOD: MOTHERS, FATHERS AND CHILDREN.

I now consider the literature on family lives with particular attention to how parenthood is socially constructed and with the gendered nature of 'family practices' (Morgan, 1996) meaning that mothers' social location deserves particular attention in this context. It was the daily practices of *mothers* in the performance of childcare that provided the focus for my research that started life as a 'personal trouble' framed as a 'public issue' (Mills, 1959). Following a review of literature on motherhood I will consider briefly how changing understandings of fatherhood and childhood are also significant for exploring family practices and family policies.

(a) Motherhood

In this research, childcare has been explored as part of the domestic division of labour (Graham, 1993) and comprising three forms of work: practical care, educational development and emotional support (Reay, 2005). With regard to all three forms of work, it is well documented that this labour is gendered and that mothers are most intensely involved in performing it (Lawler, 2000). In order to explain this we need to examine mothering "as a historically constructed ideology" (Hays, 1996: x) and as an arena that shapes the identity of many women (Graham, 1993). Whilst women may mother under different social and economic conditions, there are powerful cultural expectations regarding how mothering is performed (Hays, 1996). The concepts of 'sensitive mothering' (Walkerdine and Lucey, 1989)

and 'intensive mothering' (Hays, 1996) are utilised here to explore how motherhood is shaped in particular ways whilst being packaged as the 'natural' way of raising children. The idea of the 'sensitive mother' has played a pivotal role in the regulation of women according to Valerie Walkerdine and Helen Lucey (1989):

> The path to democracy begins in the kitchen of the sensitive mother. Here, there is supposed to be a nurturant presence which facilitates the development of her child towards natural language and reason. These develop because the sensitive mother is finely tuned to her child's struggle for meaning, extends and elaborates her utterances, transforms her own domestic work into play for her child's cognitive development. (1989: 101)

The maternal role is defined in terms of meeting children's needs and has developed to meet particular understandings of healthy child development promoted by professionals within the systems of education, health and social welfare. Walkerdine and Lucey focus specifically on relationships between mothers and their young daughters in post-war Britain in the context of educational expansion. The sensitive mother appreciates that she has an educational role and will aid the development of her child by ensuring day to day domestic tasks are turned into opportunities for learning. In addition, the sensitive mother never disciplines her child in an overt way because this is seen to undermine the child's sense of autonomy. The pressure that mothers experience in seeking to meet their child's needs may lead to feelings of guilt and failure if they fall short of these idealised child rearing practices. This vision of child rearing as pedagogy involves a celebration of white, middle class understandings of the maternal role meaning that the practices of mothers from other social backgrounds are deemed to be deficient. Hence it is possible to understand how motherhood as an ideology may lead to practices of 'mother-blaming' (Turney, 2000) for particular women.

Have wider political and cultural changes relating to the role of women in the UK during the period since Walkerdine and Lucey (1989) conducted their study encouraged mothers to question the ideology of 'sensitive mothering'? On the contrary, it is claimed that the pressures on mothers have intensified. Sharon Hays (1996) has explored contemporary expectations of mothers through the concept of 'intensive mothering':

> The ideology of intensive mothering is a gendered model that advises mothers to expend a tremendous amount of time, energy, and money in raising their children. (1996: x)

Childcare involves more than the routine practical care of children. It also embraces educational support (David *et al*, 1997; Reay, 1998; 2000; Standing, 1999) and 'emotion work' (Duncombe and Marsden, 1999) and mothers are the central players in doing this. The mothers in Hays' study were all aware of what was expected in the performance of 'intensive mothering' based on a child-centred model and informed by the advice of experts. Whilst mothers in different situations may have interpreted this model in particular ways, they all used it as a reference point:

> No matter how different the circumstances and beliefs of the mothers in my study, my interviews suggest that almost all mothers recognize and respond to this ideology- either by accepting it or, if they reject it in whole or in part, by feeling the need to justify that rejection. (Hays, 1996: 72)

As Susan E.Bell has observed, this model acts as a 'normative standard against which all mothering practices and arrangements in US society are evaluated' (2004: 46). Whilst Hays developed this model on the basis of interviews with mothers in the United States of America, 'intensive mothering' is recognised as an international ideology (Cheal, 2002). According to David Cheal the ideology 'is found in any

society where the dominant culture stresses collective progress based on individual effort and achievement' (2002: 105). Because the ideologies of 'sensitive mothering' and 'intensive mothering' refer to the same belief systems I intend to combine them through using the term 'sensitive/ intensive mothering' in this thesis. This serves as a reminder that the belief systems have evolved over a long historical period and that the pressures on mothers have intensified with wider social and cultural change and the growth of consumerism.

In her study of mothers and daughters Steph Lawler (2000) also points to the increased role of 'experts' in child development in framing what mothers are expected to do to meet the needs of their children and suggests that this amounts to a surveillance of mothering. Moreover, mothers are implicated in 'processes of *self*-surveillance' (Lawler, 2000: 20) in which their own sense of self is bound up with being a 'good mother' and in deriving pleasure from fulfilling their child's needs. In the process, 'the expertise which generates these discourses of 'normality' becomes obscured. The conditions of its production are lost in the rhetoric of 'choice'' (Lawler, 2000: 20). As a consequence of this understanding of mothering, mothers' own needs have to be reconstructed as being identical to those of their child or otherwise their needs have to be interpreted as lacking legitimacy. This may close off the ways in which mothers may express how they feel about maternity:

> ...having made the choice to have children, having expressed and fulfilled their desires in this way, there is no room for complaint.Their choices, and hence their desires, are literally embodied in their children, whose imperative needs must then structure the mother's life. (Lawler, 2000: 159)

Drawing on Foucault's theory of discourse, Lawler argues 'Discourses, then, cannot be separated from material practices or from the workings of societal institutions'

(2000: 22). She continues to explain how a category such as 'mother' is '*produced* within discourse' (2000: 22). In this way mothering as a social practice is both regulated, and an arena for self-regulation. Nevertheless, with the increased participation of women in paid work and in public life, surely this ideology of 'good' mothering and the construction of the mother's sense of identity must be disrupted? Prior to the conduct of my fieldwork with mothers, I had anticipated conducting interviews in which the social conditions of motherhood [ii] would be a source of complaint for many. As I shall illustrate in later chapters, my expectations were mistaken. In this sense I agree with Hays (1996) that the commitment of mothers to these intensive practices of childcare appears to be paradoxical and out of tune with wider social change. In her study, Hays found that it was not only the mothers who decided to stay at home while their children were young who subscribed to the ideology. Those who were in paid work struggled to meet the demands of 'intensive mothering' as part of a 'second shift' (1996: 10). Hence, mothers are faced with intense pressure and with ambivalence whatever balance of home and work is in place. Mothering occupies a moral and regulated space and yet is also devalued in favour of personal achievement in the public realm.

As the ideology of 'sensitive/intensive mothering' centres on notions of 'maternal love' and the sanctity of childhood it remains highly seductive. Furthermore, it sits alongside other discourses that celebrate 'freedom', 'choice' and 'equal opportunity' for the individual, meaning that its power as a system of domination is obscured. According to Hays, this ideology meets the interests of dominant groups in society in a variety of ways:

> Women in general do far more than their fair share of child rearing and housework, and there is much evidence that they spare men from heavier competition in the labor force. Mothers do attempt to raise their children as obedient citizens who will neither revolt against nor become dependent upon the state. And they are certainly producing workers for the future at relatively low cost at the same time that they seem to be (perhaps unwittingly) training their kids to be heavy consumers of commercial goods. (1996: 165)

These claims tie in with Smith's (1988) argument that women's daily practices are regulated by wider relations of ruling and childcare is one arena in which this claim can be explored.

Having suggested that mothers' agency in how they engage in childcare practices may be heavily regulated, there remains a need to recognise diversity and inequality in how this is interpreted by women in different circumstances and within specific social contexts. Interviews with mothers in different social circumstances enabled me to explore issues of agency and variability within the context of constraints. This involved exploring domestic and care-giving practices within particular households with regard to an interest in how families 'do gender' (O.Sullivan, 2004) and the significance of gendered caregiving ideologies (Gerstel and Gallagher, 2001). In order to develop this I have selected two areas of literature on family lives and family policy that offer useful 'middle range' concepts (Duncan and Edwards, 2003) to assist in linking these questions of 'agency' with an appreciation of 'structure'. First, I shall discuss the concept of 'gendered moral rationalities' developed by Simon Duncan and Rosalind Edwards (Duncan and Edwards, 1999; 2003; Duncan *et al*, 2004). Second, I consider the concepts of social capital and emotional capital (Reay, 2005) in relation to the conduct of mothering and its place in the reproduction of privilege and disadvantage.

It has been argued that mothers face tensions in seeking to balance paid work and domestic labour and this is based on dualistic thinking in which the 'public' and 'private' realms and 'labour' versus 'love' are difficult to reconcile (Glenn, 1994). Whilst the feminist literature on mothering and domestic labour has sought to describe these home-centred practices as 'work' (Oakley, 1976), it has been argued that this may undermine women's own understandings of their intimate relationships:

> Do we, then, risk imposing a publicly based male vision of individualised 'work' on women's lives with their children in private settings? What room is left for mothering as centred on emotion, moral identity and a particularistic relationship that does not constitute a purposive project with clearly identifiable outcomes...? (Ribbens-McCarthy and Edwards, 2002: 210)

Although I support a feminist understanding of childcare as constituting a form of labour I accept, along with Ribbens-McCarthy and Edwards (2002), that mothers may not share this interpretation and that it is important to explore their understandings of their lives with their children. In turn this will enable us to understand better the basis upon which mothers may make decisions about their responsibilities at home and in other spheres (McDowell *et al*, 2005). The concept of 'gendered moral rationalities' (Duncan and Edwards, 1999, 2003; Duncan *et al*, 2004) provides a framework for understanding how different women feel about their identity and how they make decisions about the care of children and participation in paid work. First developed in their research with lone mothers, the following definition is provided by Duncan and Edwards:

> We term the understandings the lone mothers held about their identity as mothers, and as lone mothers in particular, especially about their responsibilities towards their children, *gendered moral rationalities*. These rationalities (.....), are individually held but negotiated within social contexts. (1999: 119)

Moral understandings of 'good mothering' impact on the decisions that mothers make in relation to balancing paid work and care but these understandings are 'socially negotiated' making the framework responsive to differences between mothers and to specific social contexts. This ties in with Holloway's (1998) claim that 'moral geographies of mothering' develop within specific localities in interaction with local childcare provision. This provides my rationale for selecting three different neighbourhoods in Swansea for an exploration of mothers' perspectives on childcare.

Duncan and Edwards (1999) take up the theme that the role of mothers in meeting children's needs is socially constructed and is shaped by professional and expert advice, legislation and policy and through local social networks. It follows that there is a need for local case studies of the decisions that mothers make about work and care because the social contexts, which impact on their understandings of good mothering, will vary:

> ....it is not just spatial divisions of labour that define women's roles, it is also people's own gendered expectations, negotiations and demands about what being a woman or a man is, and what they should do in consequence. (Duncan and Edwards, 1999: 202)

Local social expectations may be as important as the character of the local labour market in the decisions that mothers' make. Moreover, the concept of 'gendered moral rationalities' could also be utilised in the analysis of fathers' relationship to work and care, as I shall illustrate in Chapter Six. Duncan and Edwards (1999) use their theory about gendered moral rationalities to suggest that New Labour family and childcare policy may be ill-conceived because it fails to take into account these

processes of moral and social negotiation (see also Barlow *et al*, 2002; Duncan *et al*, 2004). This shall be explored in Chapter Three in my analysis of New Labour family policy.

It is also important to be alert to the ways in which 'sensitive/intensive mothering' may privilege and celebrate particular ways of being a mother. In addition, the local social networks that may shape women's understanding of their roles may help to either mitigate or reinforce structures of privilege or disadvantage. The social negotiation of gendered moral rationalities calls for attention to the operation of social networks. The concept of *social capital* is utilised by Duncan and Edwards (1999) to explore the social networks of the lone mothers in their study. In this context social capital is defined as 'those features of social organisation, such as norms, values, expectations and networks of social support, which facilitate co-operation and trust between people for their mutual benefit' (Duncan and Edwards, 1999: 65). The availability of informal support for childcare, for example, is one possible element of social capital.

There has been considerable interest in the concept of social capital in recent sociological work (Franklin, 2003; Portes, 1998; Putnam, 2000) and in New Labour politics (Edwards, 2003; Franklin, 2003). Theories of social capital have been used to examine family relationships within the context of wider social processes and contemporary social change (Gillies, 2003, Holland *et al*, 2003). As Rosalind Edwards claims 'Families are often seen as a wellspring of social capital in the theorisation of its generation, accumulation and transmission' (2003: 305). Holland *et al* argue:

> The application of theories of social capital to family and other intimate relationships focuses on the resources and support that such associations generate, and on the relationship between family members and broader sections of society. (2003: 340)

However, there are different approaches to understanding social capital (Franklin, 2003) and social capital theorists have been criticised for neglecting its relationship with ethnicity and racism (Goulbourne and Solomos, 2003) and gender (Duncan and Edwards, 1999; Bruegel, 2005; Herd and Harrington Meyer, 2002). Furthermore, the concept of social capital may be seen as a new way of describing social institutions and social processes that have long captured the imagination of sociologists (Bruegel and Warren, 2003). In the field of family lives, for example, the community studies of the 1950s/1960s conducted by social scientists such as Rosser and Harris (1965) and Young and Willmott (1957) explored kin relations and social networks. It is claimed these studies 'have recently been revived by social capital theorists attempting to measure the value of social connectedness' (Gillies, 2003: 4).

In order to explain how I will utilise the concept of social capital I will draw on the framework suggested by Janet Holland, Jeffrey Weeks and Val Gillies (2003). They argue that there are currently three broad perspectives on contemporary social change in relation to family life and personal relationships. Each of these perspectives draws on different understandings of social capital.

The first perspective, *'breakdown and demoralisation'*, is associated with theorists who believe that families play a crucial role in securing social cohesion and social order and that this is under threat with individualisation. Changes in family life such as divorce and the increase in lone parent households are viewed in a negative way

within a framework that has a normative interpretation of family lives. According to Holland *et al* this normative framework 'is crucial to contemporary theorists of social capital' (2003: 341). The work of Putnam (2000) and Coleman (1988) is placed within this first perspective. Both see levels of social capital as being in decline in relation to weakening of family and community ties.

The second perspective, *'individualisation and democraticisation'*, is taken to refer to the stance taken by those theorists who see social change relating to personal relationships as progressive with a shift towards egalitarian partnerships, intimacy and gender equality. Whilst these social processes are seen to date back as far as the nineteenth century they are viewed to have intensified so that family life is now more individualised and democratised. The writings of Giddens (1991, 1992) and Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995; 2002) offer this alternative model of changes to family life. Holland *et al* suggest this interpretation of social change in personal relationships will mean the generation of trust and reciprocity is negotiated rather than assumed but nevertheless can be seen as a basis for social capital.

However, according to writers located within the third perspective, *'power relations and continuity'*, these changes in personal, intimate relationships understood as 'reflexive intimacy' may have been exaggerated. According to Lynn Jamieson 'The suggested shift to voluntary, equal, relationships of disclosing intimacy is...difficult to sustain' (1998: 161). Jane Ribbens-McCarthy and Rosalind Edwards (2002) argue that these theories of intimacy fail to take adequate account of the relationships between parents and children and the gendered character of those relationships. Most importantly, as Holland *et al* (2003) argue, this perspective gives insufficient

recognition to the impact of wider structural constraints on what happens in personal relationships, meaning that inequalities in both the public realm and in the organisation of family life are neglected.

For those theorists that emphasise power relations and continuity it is suggested that the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1986, 1990) on social capital may offer a more fruitful starting point because issues of power and the reproduction of privilege and disadvantage through different forms of capital is the main concern. This interpretation of social capital will be utilised in my framework following recent work by Virginia Morrow (1999) on children, young people and well-being, Diane Reay (2000; 2005) into mothers' involvement in their children's education and by Rosalind Edwards and Val Gillies (2004; 2005) into resources in parenting. Bourdieu's theoretical framework is based on different forms of capital: social, cultural, economic and symbolic. Each form of capital is understood in relation to the other forms in understanding how privilege and disadvantage may be reproduced. One form of capital may be converted to another form of capital. As Virginia Morrow puts it, the advantage of this framework in comparison to that proposed by theorists such as Coleman and Putnam is 'it is essentially a theory of privilege rather than a theory of inadequacy' (1999: 760). The forms of capital can be described in the following way:

Economic capital: Wealth, income and financial assets that may be inherited or earned through labour. This is viewed as 'at the root of all other types of capital' (Bourdieu, 1986: 252).

Cultural capital: The knowledge, values and ways of thinking that enable access to the dominant and most prized forms of culture in society.

Social capital: benefits and privileges resulting from social connections and social networks:

> Social capital is the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition. (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 119)

Symbolic capital: Status, honour and prestige resulting from the recognition of one of the other three forms of capital.

Family resources and family practices may be significant in the reproduction of these different forms of capital and in the translation of one form of capital into another. Here my interest is in how mothering practices relate to this framework. As Virginia Morrow observes, the position of women in the private sphere could mean 'there may be different rules for the conversion of capital for men and women' (1999: 755). The practices of 'sensitive/intensive mothering' encourage mothers to take responsibility for their children's emotional needs and educational development. In this sense mothers may be seen as taking a particular role in developing cultural capital (Reay, 2005). This is supported by recent research into parental involvement with the education system in which mothers play a central role (David, 1993; David *et al*, 1993) and illustrated in the data discussed in Chapter Six. Hence the abilities and resources of mothers from white upper and middle class backgrounds to engage more easily with the logic of 'sensitive/intensive mothering' may confer advantages

for their children. Moreover, with regard to social capital, the informal gendered networks of support and friendship that mothers may inhabit (Bell and Ribbens, 1994; Ribbens, 1994) may also place some at an advantage whilst excluding others. Those forms of social capital relevant to the care of children are gendered and are managed especially by mothers (Edwards and Gillies, 2005). The socially negotiated 'gendered moral rationalities' that these networks may help to construct are thus embedded within deeper systems of social control, power and inequality. It is in this way, therefore, that both 'gendered moral rationalities' and the different forms of capital are utilised in this research to link mothers' agency and social practices with the 'relations of ruling'.

Diane Reay (2000; 2005), drawing on Helga Nowotny (1981) [iii] and Patricia Allatt (1993) [iv], has proposed that there is a further form of capital, *emotional capital*. This may be useful for exploring the role of mothers in managing emotional needs and safeguarding the emotional interests of children and other family members. According to Patricia Allatt, drawing on Nowotny (1981)[v], emotional capital is a form of social or cultural capital 'whose use, under certain conditions, is largely confined within the bounds of affective relationships of family and friendship' (Allatt, 1993: 143). Reay (2000) explains that 'emotional capital' must be understood to refer to a narrower range of action than 'emotional involvement'. In her research it is understood as 'the emotional resources passed on from mother to child through processes of parental involvement' (Reay, 2000: 569). More specifically Reay uses this concept to explore the significance of mothers' emotional involvement in their children's education. Working within a psychotherapeutic context, Garland, Hume and Majid (2002) understand 'emotional capital' as referring to the capacity to make

emotional connections. They further argue that this capacity is necessary in order for individuals to be able to make use of social capital. In this research it is utilised as part of my framework for examining how mothers justify their childcare practices and their interaction with formal and informal sources of childcare and parenting support.

(b) Fatherhood and childhood

Whilst my focus is on the role of mothers, it must be recognised that the social construction of motherhood is intrinsically linked to particular constructions of both fatherhood and childhood. Dominant ideologies, cultural norms and social practices may construct barriers for men wishing to engage in care (McKie *et al*, 2001). According to Lynda Clarke and Ceridwen Roberts (2002) there has been a shift evident since the 1980s towards research into family lives that includes the perspectives of fathers. Hence, research across the social sciences has become more 'father-sensitive' (Clarke and Roberts, 2002: 170) and the study of fatherhood has taken off (Burghes *et al*, 1997; Clarke and Roberts, 2001; Lewis, 2000; McKee and O'Brien, 1982; Morgan, 2000). Whilst limits of space preclude a thorough review of this literature it is useful to summarise certain key points suggested by Clarke and Roberts:

- Father involvement is believed to be important for children but is an area that needs further exploration;
- Fathering is multi-dimensional and may be practised in diverse ways;
- The study of fathering should be sensitive to contextual factors that may impact on how a father balances different roles such as between paid work and childcare;

- There may be a gap between how fathers wish to conduct their role and what can be achieved in practice.

(2002:172-173)

This research included interviews with a small number of fathers in order to expand an understanding of gendered childcare practices in relation to these themes. The findings are reported in Chapter Six. The way that fatherhood is also constructed in family and childcare policy is explored in Chapter Three. As Clarke and Roberts observe, the shift towards father-sensitive research has not been matched entirely by policy and 'responses have been simplistic and the rhetoric has not recognised the complexity and diversity of family life' (2002: 178).

We have seen that the social construction of motherhood links to specific assumptions about the needs of children and healthy child development. This involves a vision of the child as sacred and occupying a place at the centre of the maternal world (Hays, 1996). Whilst family policy and professional child welfare practices are gendered, they also constitute children in specific ways (Moss *et al*, 2000; Pinkney, 2000). With the growth of childhood studies as an inter-disciplinary field and the interest in including a 'child standpoint' in research (Mayall, 2002) comes a concern to re-think children and childhood. As Mayall has put it ' Like feminism for women, the sociology of childhood is working for children' (2002: 178). Alongside developments in sociology and other social sciences has been a trend towards making children visible within social policy and the political process (Wyness, 2001). The social construction of childhood may be articulated through two discourses, of children's *needs* and children's *interests* (Qvortup, 1994). An alternative, but comparable, distinction is made by Archard (1993) between

caretakers seeking to protect children and *child liberationists* who seek to empower them. According to Wyness (2001) the discourse of children's needs has been dominant in how children are thought of and this is in tension with the discourse of children's collective interests. Hence, it can be argued that 'sensitive/intensive mothering' may lead to the more effective control of children through constituting their 'needs' in specific ways rather than contributing to their empowerment. Children have been placed at the centre of social policy by New Labour (Lister, 2003; F.Williams, 2004a). What will this mean for mothers, fathers and children? Will policy disrupt the assumptions underpinning intensive child rearing or contribute to the further intensification of the parenting role? It will be important to pursue these questions further in the analysis of New Labour family policy in Chapter Three.

SECTION THREE: FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES ON THE WELFARE STATE, GENDER AND CARE.

I now explore the relationship between the welfare state, gender and the care of children. This is intended to develop further an understanding of how 'daily lives' under specific social conditions interconnect with 'relations of ruling' and will also provide a backdrop to the analysis of UK social policy under New Labour contained in Chapter Three. There my focus will be on links between family policy, the National Childcare Strategy and welfare state restructuring.

(a) Feminist theories of the state: a brief review.

Traditional theories of the state and analyses of the welfare state have been criticised by feminist social scientists for their failure to consider gender (Lister, 1997; Pascall, 1997). Traditional state theories vary in the significance they accord to the role of the state with regard to class relations, their understanding of the relationship between the economic, political and social realms and their emphasis on processes that operate outside of or internally to the state (Charles, 2000). Although these theories have nothing directly to say about gender, their arguments are based on unspoken assumptions about gender relations- in this sense they have been criticised for not only being gender blind but also gender biased:

> So the issue of gender, *formally* excluded from the discourse of state theory, is nevertheless present under the surface. State theory must deal with it somehow. (Connell, 1990: 511)

Feminist perspectives have been important for exploring how state theory may deal with gender. Some feminists following the emphases of representational theories have sought to extend understanding of how gender interests are represented within the state. Others have focused more directly on the internal organisation of state institutions and how these reflect gender relations. Feminists also disagree on whether the state can be conceived of as something that is dangerous for women, to be avoided or as offering a base for political change.

According to Connell (1990) liberal feminism has played an important role in drawing attention to the underlying gender bias of state practices. Liberal state theory

promotes a view of the state as formally neutral and protecting the rights of individual citizens. Liberal feminism claims that this ideal has not been achieved as women have not been accorded equal treatment. Hence, political campaigns are articulated in terms of demands for equal access and equal opportunities achieved through legislation and political representation. Although the limits of liberal feminism are well known, in that the basic structure and functions of the state are taken for granted, Connell reminds us of the historical importance of liberal feminism. The suffrage movement, campaigns for equal pay and the passing of anti-discrimination legislation have a basis in liberal feminist interpretations of the state. Although liberal feminism '..treats patriarchy as an accident, an imperfection that needs to be ironed out' (Connell, 1990: 513) it has nevertheless inspired reforms that have provided women with access to the state. However, it can be argued that we need to move beyond the confines of liberal feminism if women are to make the most of that access.

Radical feminism has taken patriarchy as its central concept and the state is seen as representing patriarchal interests (Walby, 1986). Men are seen to have power over women and the state plays a role in maintaining male domination. In some accounts the concept of patriarchy is taken to be universal with 'an independent structure of its own' (Dahlerup, 1987: 95). However, patriarchy has been defined in different ways. According to Fiona Williams (1989) radical feminists have understood patriarchy in two particular ways. First, in terms of control over sexuality and second, control over women's reproductive capacity (Firestone, 1979). In both aspects a patriarchal state may serve to institutionalise this control, through, for example, legislation relating to rape, domestic violence or to abortion. Patriarchal values may also shape welfare

policies in relation to ideologies around motherhood and family as illustrated in Part Two.

Some feminists have been uncomfortable with the biological determinist slant of these arguments including a concern that this leaves us without a political strategy for change (Williams, 1989). In practice it has encouraged personal and political separatism, and this is problematic in that it leaves the dominant institutions of society unchanged. Essentialist claims about women's nature run into the danger of obscuring divisions between women on the basis of social class, ethnicity, sexuality and other dimensions. Despite these weaknesses radical feminism has played a significant role in highlighting how the state may act systematically against the interests of women, and, at its worst, maintains violence against women. In addition, radical feminists have drawn attention to how male domination is achieved in the labour market and within families.

Marxist feminist and socialist feminist analyses focus attention on the links between class and gender relations. They have drawn attention to the gender blindness of classical Marxist theory on the grounds that it ignored the significance of unpaid domestic labour in the reproduction and support of the workforce. This is important for an appreciation of the relationship between the state, families and the labour market and for raising questions about the value of unpaid care. However, socialist feminists have developed these claims in order to avoid reducing our understanding of gender relations to the needs of a capitalist economy. A theoretical framework is required that maintains a focus on the links between gender and social class and that explores the role of the state in relation to economic policy. However, this does not

mean that the state's policies and procedures in relation to gender can simply be read off from class interests or economic interests. At times there may be a close fit between capitalist interests and patriarchal interests but at other times there may be tension. An economy driven childcare strategy to encourage women to undertake paid work, for example, may conflict with patriarchal ideologies that place women as providers of unpaid domestic support. In Part Two I refer to the work of Simon Duncan and others (Duncan and Edwards, 1999; Barlow *et al*, 2002) in indicating how 'gendered moral rationalities' reflect such tensions. Indeed, these tensions between patriarchal interests and capitalist interests are crucial to an understanding of welfare state policies (Williams, 1989). In terms of feminist political strategy there may be scope for exploiting the loopholes in state policies that arise from these contradictions. However, a feminist politics that focuses on gender alone is unlikely to present a fundamental challenge to state patriarchy because of its intersection with capitalist interests.

Furthermore, a feminist understanding of the state must take account of racialised relations. Black feminism has drawn attention to the ethnocentric nature of a great deal of feminist theory (Collins, 1990; Parmar, 1990). Indeed, all variants of feminist theory discussed so far have failed to do justice to ways in which the impact of the state may vary for women with diverse interests (Lovenduski and Randall, 1993). This is especially important in seeking to understand the relationship between the welfare state, paid work and families because women from different minority ethnic communities may experience this in distinct ways (Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1992).

This review of feminist theories of the state in relation to the categories of liberal feminism, radical feminism, socialist feminism and black feminism highlights some of the differences in second wave feminism of the 1970s and 1980s. However, in relation to feminist political campaigns these differences may not be so clear cut. Furthermore, during the 1990s some feminist writers became uncomfortable with these distinctions and, in taking on post-structural analyses, moved in a new direction. Georgina Waylen (1998) has commented that the liberal, radical and socialist feminist perspectives all tended to emphasise the power of the state as a social structure and have underplayed the scope for human agency in contesting its power. Post-structural analyses have moved away from seeing the state as a separate entity that represents interests based in society. Some feminists have shifted to an understanding of the state as a process and set of discourses that are created through political struggle, drawing on a Foucauldian interpretation of power (Watson, 1990).

Post-structural theories are valuable for highlighting the role of human agency in influencing/ creating state processes and in respecting the heterogeneity of the state. Yet paradoxically they may leave us without a coherent political strategy. Indeed, the emergence of post-structural theories coincides with the sidelining of meaningful feminist and left political action in UK politics (Segal, 2000). Joni Lovenduski and Vicky Randall (1993) claim that the crisis in socialist thinking of the left in Britain since the late 1980s has provided a space to arrive at more sophisticated theories. However, I remain unconvinced that post-structural accounts offer a satisfactory alternative. I agree that power is pervasive and is 'something that is produced in every social relationship' (Lovenduski and Randall, 1993: 171). However, we need a theory that connects daily social relationships with major social structures including

the state and the economic realm. My thoughts in this regard are developed in the following section.

(b) The state as an institution and site of regulation

Whilst I accept Foucault's claim that power operates in our daily lives and reaches beyond the state, this is not a case for arguing the state has no boundaries, that it is everywhere. The state has a *material* base and is *more than* a set of shifting power relations and discourses; it is a concrete entity with boundaries that are diverse and complex:

> ...discursive strategies are significant in the gendering of the state but it is important also to consider how these intersect with material conditions and institutional structures. (Tickell and Peck, 1996: 603)

The state is a key player within the "relations of ruling" (Smith, 1988) and occupies a central place in the 'construction of the world as texts' (Smith, 1988: 3) which mediate dominant discourses and create ways of thinking about gender that are thus naturalised.

However, there is scope for resisting and reworking dominant discourses as the state takes different forms over time and across different societies and it is composed of a wide variety of institutions and domains of action. Hence it is complex and contradictory and may be viewed as a site of struggle. In developing state theory further I have found the framework proposed by Connell (1990) to be helpful. Although Connell also refers to the state as a process he accepts that we need 'an analysis of the institutional apparatus of the state that makes regulation possible' (1990: 509). In order to do this he sees a need to look beyond the Foucauldian

tradition to socialist state theory and the sociology of bureaucracy. Connell refers to the state as an entity defined as 'the set of institutions currently subject to co-ordination (by administrative or budgetary means) by a state directorate' (1990: 510). It is this understanding of the state that is relevant to my interests in Government policy at national, regional and local levels.

Some feminists have seen the state as offering potential for political engagement despite claims that it acts in patriarchal and capitalist interests (Connell, 1990). A framework is required that does justice to this for, as Nickie Charles points out, 'feminist social movements engage with the state by confronting it *and* by working within it; it is experienced as both enabling and constraining, as oppressive and responsive to pressure for change' (2000: 28). Connell's framework offers potential here. His claims will be presented in Box 1:

BOX 1: A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE STATE AND GENDER RELATIONS SUMMARISED FROM CONNELL (1990)

1. The state is both a crucial structure of gendered power and is constructed through gender dynamics. Although it is not the only structure of power it is '..the main organizer of the power relations of gender' (Connell, 1990: 520). An appreciation of this invites close attention to the history of the state.
2. Particular states have a specific 'gender regime' that has emerged as a result of political struggles and gender relations within that society. Connell suggests that 3 key structures make up the gender regime: (a) the gendered division of labour; (b) a structure of bureaucratic power and (c) a structure of cathexis. This refers to emotional attachments, themselves related to a gendered division of labour.
3. The state is able to regulate gender relations across society, albeit within limits. State intervention may be apparent in both public and private domains.
4. Through the state's capacity to regulate social structures it may act as a creative force and may work to change the gender order over time.
5. In view of the central role of the state as stakeholder in gender politics it has been and will remain a focus for political action.
6. The state is subject to change and vulnerable to crises. This provides a space for political change and a reshaping of the gender order.

This framework respects the far-reaching power of the state and indicates that feminists need to engage with it, it cannot be avoided. In viewing the state as a site of struggle and as contradictory there is scope for feminist movements to exploit loopholes and reshape policy. The state will be more open to change in some arenas than in others and the delivery of welfare policies is one arena that may offer opportunities for political activity.

(c) The welfare state and regime analysis

The role of the welfare state has been of particular interest to feminists for a variety of reasons. As Fiona Williams (1991) points out, women may experience the welfare state as workers, as consumers of services and in political struggle over welfare policies. In order to understand these relationships it is necessary to appreciate the functions of the welfare state in maintaining a "racially structured and patriarchal capitalism" (Williams, 1991: 306). In this sense the welfare state has a key role to play within the 'relations of ruling' (Smith, 1988) and yet has also provided opportunities for women in entering public employment (Lister, 1997) and in political participation.

In exploring the history of the welfare state in the UK and the character of social policy it is possible to appreciate Connell's claim that the state regulates gender relations across society. This intervention cuts across public and private domains by the construction of particular relations between gender, family, care and paid work.

> The breadwinner/ housewife model of the family was entrenched in British society in the post-war period; policies based on it, aiming to protect and sustain it, were building blocks of the welfare state. (Pascall, 1997:33)

Although this model has been challenged in many ways, with women's participation in paid work, and with changes within families and personal relationships, gender inequalities within the labour market and domestic realm continue (McKie *et al*, 2001; Speakman and Marchington, 1999). Women's traditional caregiving, examined in Section Two, has continued to be a significant factor in the reproduction of

inequalities. Whilst legislation and social policy in the UK has to some extent started to support, indeed encourage, women's labour market participation, it has done less to support women's caring role or to challenge the gendered nature of caring (McKie *et al*, 2001). This can be partially explained in relation to the three structures that make up the 'gender regime' (Connell, 1990). The welfare state is based on a gendered division of labour that often mirrors that of the domestic realm. Women, for example, make up the majority of care workers with poor pay and unsatisfactory working conditions. The welfare state as a structure of bureaucratic power is dominated by men and by patriarchal values in terms of the making of legislation and policy, and in control of funding. Nevertheless, it is often women who have to negotiate with the bureaucracy in claiming welfare benefits. And the structure of cathexis, the gendered nature of emotional attachments is crucial for understanding the persisting role of women as primary carers and the ideologies that support this as discussed in Section Two.

In understanding the 'gender regime' of particular welfare states and the scope for variation in the way welfare states shape gender relations, comparative analysis can highlight new possibilities for pursuing a gender equality agenda (Pascall and Lewis, 2004; Sainsbury, 1994; 1999). In this respect the interest of feminist scholars in modifying the typology of 'welfare regimes' proposed by Gosta Esping- Andersen (1990) deserves attention. This typology was based on three dimensions. First, is how welfare states operate as a system of social rights with specific rules of access and entitlement. This is linked to the concept of 'de-commodification' which refers to 'the degree to which individuals, or families, can uphold a socially acceptable standard of living independently of market participation' (Esping-Andersen, 1990:

37). Welfare states are claimed to vary in how far they enable de-commodification. Second, is an examination of the inter-relationship between the state, market and family. Third, is a concern with the system of social stratification that results from this. As Birgit Pfau-Effinger explains 'The construction of this typology focuses on a central question as to how, and to what extent, the welfare state differentially influences existing structures of social inequality' (1998: 148).

Esping-Andersen (1990) thus distinguishes between three types of welfare state regime. The *social democratic* welfare state regime offers universal social rights enabling de-commodification and equality in class access to provision. The Scandinavian states provide examples of this type of welfare state regime. The *liberal* welfare state regime determines access to welfare benefits through means testing and a basic level of support for those most in need. This type of regime is characterised by class inequalities with those who do not enjoy access to the market facing a poor standard of living. Countries that show these characteristics include Britain, the United States of America (USA), Canada and Australia. Finally, the *conservative-corporate* welfare state regime offers social rights on the basis of class and status. There is also an expectation that the traditional family should provide care and welfare. Countries linked to this type of regime include Germany, Austria, France and Italy.

This typology can show the degree to which the state can make a difference in shaping rights of citizenship and modifying systems of class stratification within the context of capitalist economies. However, despite the inclusion of family within the framework, Esping-Andersen has been criticised by feminist social scientists for his

neglect of gender as a dimension of stratification (Lewis,1992; Lister, 1997). This should be qualified with reference to Pfau-Effinger (1998) who points out that Esping-Andersen does pay some attention to gender in that he considers how each welfare regime stands in relation to the labour market participation of women. The capacity of women to undertake paid work is shaped by the availability of state or market services to support family needs, for example, in the care of dependants. In social-democratic regimes the state provides services that free women to take paid work. In liberal regimes the market is assumed to respond where there is sufficient demand for such services. In conservative-corporate regimes there is an emphasis on the traditional family providing care, meaning that women are not enabled to undertake paid work. However, this still amounts to a neglect of gender because the focus is on the capacity of individuals to undertake paid work. Yet Esping-Andersen does not question the unpaid labour of women within families and gendered relations within the family, including women's role in providing welfare within the home (Pfau-Effinger, 1998). As Simon Duncan and Rosalind Edwards argue, the model is 'largely gender blind. Women disappear from the analysis as soon as they disappear from the labour market' (1999: 218).

The concept of decommodification is especially problematic in its omission of gender differences (Orloff, 1993; Langan and Ostner, 1991) because women and men are affected in different ways by specific welfare regimes (Duncan and Edwards, 1999). The concept conflates the position of individuals and families (Lister, 1997) taking no account of power differences and economic dependency within families. Indeed, Esping-Andersen (1999) has acknowledged some of the feminist critique of his original typology and has paid more detailed attention to the role of families

within the model of welfare regimes. However, feminist scholars believe his attention to the gendered family household remains limited (Brush, 2002; Shaver, 2002) and that mainstream welfare regime theorists are resistant to feminist demands that gender must be taken seriously (Brush, 2002; Padamsee and Adams, 2002).

In taking the concept of welfare regimes further, what can be learned from the feminist literature? In order to take account of gender relations Ann Orloff (1993) proposed a revised and extended framework for comparing welfare state regimes following Esping-Andersen's schema:

1. *The state-market-family relations dimension:* The interest in how different countries organise their welfare provision must be extended to include the contribution of families as well as state and market relations;

2. *The stratification dimension:* In exploring the system of social stratification there is a need to examine the impact of social provision by the state on gender relations, including the treatment of paid and unpaid labour;

3. *The social citizenship rights/ decommodification dimension*: must include awareness that welfare benefits may have a differential impact on men and women;

In addition Orloff proposes two further dimensions:

4. *Access to paid work:* an examination of how welfare states may encourage or curtail paid employment for women;

5. *Capacity to create and maintain an autonomous household*: this is explained by Orloff in the following way:

> If decommodification is important because it frees wage earners from the compulsion of participating in the market, a parallel dimension is needed to indicate the ability of those who do most of the domestic and caring work- almost all women- to form and maintain autonomous households, that is, to survive and support their children without having to marry to gain access to breadwinners' income.
> (1993: 319)

According to Orloff, feminists have sought to secure this capacity for autonomy in two main ways. First, through ensuring that domestic and caring labour is financially rewarded and, second, through enabling women to engage in paid work through ensuring households have access to services that support care. These strategies relate to the tension between discourses of 'recognition' and discourses of 'redistribution' (Fraser, 1997; Lister, 2001), and this will be a question for further exploration in relation to how support for childcare can best serve claims for gender equality in the UK. Pascall points out that 'The relationship between gender and caring varies between welfare states but always exists' (1997: 19). The framework outlined by Orloff (1993) allows us to give some regard to this relationship.

Through their focus on gender, feminists have developed various alternative approaches to the gendering of welfare regimes. Some seek to place the gender assumptions that underpin social and economic policies at the heart of their analysis, for example, by classifying welfare state regimes in relation to the significance of the

'male breadwinner, female homemaker' contract. Jane Lewis (1992) draws a distinction between 'strong', 'modified' and 'weak' breadwinner states that differ according to the extent to which welfare provision assumes a norm of a male breadwinner with a dependent wife and children. Using this typology Britain is seen as a strong breadwinner state. According to Pfau-Effinger this model can aid comparative policy analysis because 'it is based on the notion of gender and of the interrelation of paid and unpaid work, and it also recognizes that the policies of the welfare state are based on cultural assumptions concerning gender' (1998: 149).

However, Pfau-Effinger (1998) proceeds to criticise the model on the grounds that there is no distinction between culture and structure, when in fact there may be tensions in their relationship. She proposes that a greater level of precision is required using the concepts of 'gender culture', 'gender order', and 'gender arrangement' which are defined in the following way:

Gender culture: the norms and values that underpin what is viewed as 'the desirable, "correct" form of gender relations and of the division of labour between men and women' (1998: 150);

Gender order: the relevant structures of gender relationships where three social institutions, the labour market, families/ households and the state (including the education system), are especially important.

Gender arrangement: This is the frame produced by the gender culture and gender order. It emphasises 'the role of social actors and their negotiations and struggles on

the binding contents of the gender culture and the gender structures' (Pfau-Effinger, 1998: 150).

This model has the advantage of enabling us to acknowledge and explore discontinuities between cultural norms, social policies and social institutions and to recognise that this means there may be struggles over social policies in which gender plays a key role. Furthermore, the model links with and complements Connell's (1990) understanding of the state and gender relations and his concept of a gender regime comprising three structures. It is also a model that can link with the 'middle range' concept of gendered moral rationalities (Duncan and Edwards, 1999) which relate to the gender culture and can vary locally within a particular regime.

Attention to the specific nature of the *local* state in the United Kingdom is also essential for understanding the connections between families and welfare services and the nature of the gender regime. Indeed, there are claims that the local state has been more open to feminist demands and the pursuit of gender equality than the central state in the UK, and that there is 'an affinity between women and local democracy' (Phillips, 1996: 129). It is necessary to explore 'gendered cultures' and the 'gender order' at local, regional and central levels and this research seeks to do so in relation to childcare policy and family practices.

In this thesis I explore both the local state and the regional state as distinctive sites of gendered power. The local state is a key provider of welfare services (Cochrane, 1994) and is a part of the system of governance and delivery of social policy that has experienced a profound restructuring since the 1980s (Jones, 1998; Raco, 2002).

There is scope for the interpretation of policy to meet local needs and, in the case of the childcare agenda, to address the circumstances of local labour markets. It is essential to examine the character of the local state in order to understand the possibilities for local policy implementation in the field of childcare and the constraints that remain.

Taken together, the constructs identified in this section provide a way in to making sense of changes in family policy such as the 'welfare to work' strategy in the UK in relation to gender. In this sense my interest is in how policy has shifted historically within the same society and the possibility for regional and local variation in the context of devolution. The increased emphasis on paid work as the route to citizenship for both women and men (Lister, 1997) has restructured the welfare state in fundamental ways with regard to both capital-labour relations and with regard to the gender order. It provides an example of the possibility that the gender culture and the gender order may be in tension encouraging locally negotiated gender arrangements.

(d) Feminist perspectives on citizenship

Feminist debates about the role of the state in relation to women explore further the concept of citizenship (Lister, 1997; Pateman, 1992; Walby, 1994). The limitation of a concept of citizenship based on participation in paid work relates to the dichotomy between the public and private that has been questioned by feminists. Ruth Lister interprets citizenship as both a *status* that endows certain rights and as a *practice* that entails obligations and political participation (1997: 41). Lister discusses the role of the sexual division of labour in the construction of citizenship rights for women and

men. She pays attention to the relationship between the private and public realms in shaping the economic position of women and their political participation. Women experience particular barriers to citizenship because of their different relationship to paid work opportunities resulting from the sexual division of labour in the private sphere. This is especially important in a society such as the UK where participation in paid work is seen as the 'key to citizenship' (Lister, 1997: 139). The provision of social citizenship rights on the basis of paid work privileges men and devalues the contribution of those providing unpaid care (Kittay, 2001; McKie *et al*, 2001). In Fraser's terms, this amounts to a cultural injustice in which carers are not recognised for their contribution to society.

Lister (1997) argues that, in seeking citizenship, women have been faced with a dilemma that is rooted in this false separation of the private and public spheres, of unpaid caring labour and paid work. Either women claim *equality* with men on the basis of universal principles or they make claims for their *differences* to be respected and rewarded. Lister refers to these claims as based on a gender-neutral model or a gender-differentiated model of citizenship respectively. Whilst claims for *equality* are often associated with rights in the public realm and paid work as a route to women's independence, claims for *difference* may be associated with women's caring responsibility and dependence in the private realm. Earlier, I referred to Orloff's (1993) observation that both 'recognition' and 'redistribution' claims may be linked to struggles for women's independence and their capacity to form and maintain an autonomous household. However, each model carries different implications for social policy and may present a dilemma for feminists (Kittay, 2001). Taken alone, claims for 'recognition' and respect for cultural differences might involve the valuing

of those that provide care. Given the gendered nature of care this could mean the celebration of women's traditional role as mothers and respect for the labour involved in this role. In social policy terms this could involve the provision of welfare benefits that support unpaid carers and help them achieve financial independence. As Orloff (1993) points out, some women reformers fought for benefits to support mothers to be home to care for their children so that they would have an income of their own. Historically, therefore, there is a link between maternalist policies and recognition claims that leave some feminists uneasy. There is continuing concern that benefits for carers could further entrench gender inequality, as it is women who would be most likely to continue to do the care and to forgo paid work opportunities. In addition, this could essentialise women's role as mothers closing off other options. Hence, second wave feminists appear to have focused more on claims for 'redistribution' of resources and on drawing attention to socio-economic injustices. Orloff (1993) argues that the feminist strategy to secure economic independence for women thus shifted from maternalist policies to expanding opportunities for paid work and redistributing caring and domestic labour. The problem remains that this shift of focus from 'recognition' claims to 'redistribution' claims obscures the fact that they are intrinsically linked and both are needed. Neither model taken independently can offer satisfactory outcomes for women. Recognition without redistribution could further entrench gender inequalities but redistribution cannot be achieved without recognition that women are culturally subordinate to men and that choices are framed by gendered cultural norms. As Fraser argues 'Justice today requires *both* redistribution *and* recognition; neither alone is sufficient' (2001: 22). Indeed, in view of diversity amongst women each model carries different benefits and drawbacks for distinct groups. Lister (1997)

proposes that we need to reconstruct our understanding of citizenship to embrace the notion of a *'differentiated universalism'* that takes us beyond this dichotomy and respects diversity amongst women and men.

Lister claims that those policies that reward difference by providing benefits for those undertaking unpaid caring labour at home may, as a consequence, undermine women's position in paid work and hence their claims for equality and independence. She argues that policies need to support opportunities for all citizens to combine *both* earning and caring roles. Furthermore, if women are not to continue at a disadvantage this will mean significant changes to the domestic division of labour so that men also play an active role in a society that values care responsibilities as a basis for citizenship (Lister, 1997).

The social policies that Lister recommends include those that could provide time and support for people to care: parental and carers leave, time off work for family reasons and the expansion of care services. However, Lister contends that policy should not leave carers with the option of remaining outside the labour market for extended periods of time. It is in this respect that, in my view, her argument is problematic, contradictory and seems to perpetuate the dualism between the private and the public realms that she had recognised to be problematic. She argues that the right to take time out of the labour market in order to care should be *limited* and, in her discussion of lone parents, she argues that it is reasonable to expect their labour market participation, once their children reach a certain (unspecified) age. Lister is suggesting that unpaid care should be valued and supported (meeting recognition claims) and should be distributed more equally (meeting redistribution claims).

However, she maintains a distinction between unpaid care and paid employment. Lister thus perpetuates the dualism that she has criticised. In contrast I argue that those with caring responsibilities have their labour recognised as *meaningful work* in its own right and as a *full-time option* for those who choose it (Kittay, 2001). It must be recognised that carers provide a vital service for society and this should be adequately rewarded financially. This would go beyond the benefits offered by some welfare states in the context of maternalist policies because these have generally been provided at such a low level that they result in inequalities between those who are at home and those in paid employment (Orloff, 1993). In this sense recognition has been offered without adequate redistribution of resources but this is not inevitable. At the same time there should be an expansion of public care services for those who wish to combine care with paid work, education or other activities, or who need respite, so that there are real choices available at different points in the family life course. In turn this could shift the preferences of both women and men with regard to how they manage care and other forms of work. Gender equality cannot be secured without a significant commitment to redistribution including the expansion of state care services (Pascall and Lewis, 2004). At the same time existing cultural norms relating to gender can presents limits to redistribution, as Kevin Olson observes 'Social policies designed to degender labor and redistribute caregiving are limited by their beneficiaries' culturally rooted choices' (2002: 381).

Whether women and men wish to care full-time, work outside the home full-time or integrate a variety of roles, the key to enjoying both equality and difference lies with proper support for the conduct of care through public expenditure and the redistribution of wealth. Social policy can be reshaped to support this vision

providing care work is rewarded financially and supported through public universal services within a package of citizenship rights. In Finland, for example, all parents of young children are able to choose between taking a place in municipal childcare or claiming welfare benefits that can be used to purchase a private childcare place or to support informal parent care. As Katja Repo observes, this system helps to 'enlarge the choices available to parents and can be argued to represent a new form of universalism' (2004: 625). This provides an interesting contrast to the National Childcare Strategy in the UK, to be explored in Chapter Three. The deep relationship between gender, care giving, dependence and vulnerability to poverty that is a feature of the UK as a liberal welfare state regime and as a strong (albeit challenged) 'breadwinner state' persists within a climate of restructuring. The promotion of market-based solutions to care may do more to consolidate inequalities than to challenge them.

CONCLUSION: TOWARDS AN 'ETHICS OF CARE' FOR MOTHERS, FATHERS AND CHILDREN?

In this chapter I have proposed a conceptual framework that will enable me to explore the interaction of childcare practices and childcare policies from a feminist standpoint and with due regard to the relationship between agency and structure. The concepts of 'sensitive/intensive mothering' (Walkerdine and Lucey, 1989; Hays, 1996); 'gendered moral rationalities' (Duncan and Edwards, 1999) and 'social and emotional capital' (Reay, 2005; 2005) will assist my analysis of my interviews with mothers, fathers and grandmothers in Chapters Six and Seven. The concepts discussed in Section Three in relation to gendered welfare regimes will be developed

in my discussion of New Labour childcare policy in the context of welfare restructuring in Chapters Three and Four.

It is hoped that this thesis will make a contribution to the feminist commitment to taking care seriously. As Daly claims, care 'is one of the original feminist concepts' (2002: 252) and I have been inspired by arguments that we should develop an 'ethics of care' within social policy (Sevenhuijsen, 2002; Williams, 2001). According to Fiona Williams there is a need to explore the political argument for an ethics of care and we should ask 'who is benefiting and who not from existing care policies' (2001: 487). This is a question to which I will return in my analysis of New Labour social policy in Chapter Three. In the next chapter I will turn to issues of research methodology.

CHAPTER TWO: DOING FEMINIST RESEARCH INTO CHILDCARE PRACTICES? METHODOLOGY, REFLEXIVITY AND THE RESEARCH PROCESS

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I will reflect on the practical, ethical and political issues encountered during the research; an approach inspired by autobiographical accounts of the research process (Bell and Newby, 1977; Davies and Jones, 2003; Devine and Heath, 1999). I will introduce the research methods that were selected and explore some of the methodological issues that I encountered in doing feminist research into the relations between childcare policies and mothers' daily caring practices[vi]. My aim was to develop a feminist research agenda that was capable of understanding the everyday world of mothers in diverse circumstances whilst utilising their accounts to evaluate public policy in the field of parenting and childcare. The chapter is divided into four sections. In Section One I place the research within the context of biographical issues relating to my position as a mother with young children. In Section Two I explain how I researched childcare practices from a feminist standpoint (Stanley and Wise, 1990), developing the method of 'institutional ethnography' (Smith, 1988) introduced in Chapter One alongside feminist critical policy analysis (Marshall, 1997; 2000). I also develop my approach to the analysis of policy texts through the utilisation of the concepts of 'framing' (Benford and Snow, 2000), 'condensation symbols' (Edelman, 1964) and the 'discursive opportunity structure' (Ferree, 2003). In Section Three I introduce the research with reference to

the selection of research methods, the sample and the three case study areas in Swansea. In Section Four I provide a reflexive account of the interview process, with particular reference to some of the challenges that I encountered in talking with other mothers about their childcare practices.

SECTION ONE: MOVING FROM THE PRIVATE TO THE PUBLIC? PERSONAL ISSUES IN RESEARCHING FAMILY PRACTICES.

The inspiration for this research emerged from a combination of autobiographical influences. The identity of the researcher is likely to be important in all research (Roseneil, 1993) and the adoption of a reflexive approach is central to ethnographic work and the use of qualitative methods (Davies and Jones, 2003; Ribbens and Edwards, 1998). I seek to remain 'reflexive' about how my biography has influenced the research process. Like Jane Ribbens (1998), my intention here is to provide an autobiographical account of how my identity as a mother influenced the research. Before the birth of my eldest son in 1995 I had established interests in feminist sociology and feminist politics and this had focused mainly on issues relating to the promotion of gender equality in the public realm. These were issues that I had explored in my teaching and research and politically as a member of the Labour Party and various women's groups. However, with the transition to motherhood I started to look for some sociological answers to the personal dilemmas that I was facing. These dilemmas were rooted not in the practicalities of having to care for a new baby but in suddenly finding that others judged me in relation to my competence as a mother. This came as an enormous shock and as a threat to my sense of independence and personal autonomy.

My husband and I had agreed that after the birth of our son I would return to work to complete a full-time research contract. He would stay at home on weekdays to look after Nicholas, confining his paid work as a care assistant to part-time hours at the weekends. This arrangement, referred to as 'shift parenting' (Lewis, 2003) was relatively unusual in that it represented a reversal of the 'one- and- a –half-earner model' (Lewis, 2002) with a male full-time worker and female part-time worker. It was the only arrangement that could work for us given that my conditions of employment were more favourable than were my husband's and we had no access to any informal support for childcare. Neither of us was prepared for the curiosity, hostility and criticism that our arrangement would generate. Often we would find ourselves called to justify this arrangement to others including immediate family and neighbours. I also found that despite our decision to share childcare that I was still treated as the person with main responsibility for our son in any contact with health, childcare and education professionals. On one occasion my husband and I attended the local baby clinic together when Nicholas was a few months old. I informed the health visitor that I was shortly due to return to work and my husband would be primary carer during the week. Despite this information she turned her back on my husband during our visit, was evidently very uncomfortable that he was present and finally asked him if he would mind leaving the room whilst she discussed the business of weaning with me! This and numerous other 'critical incidents' served to remind me that the rhetoric of equal opportunities for women seemed to have done little to challenge deep-rooted domestic ideologies. My personal experience reminded me daily that childcare and gender are intimately linked whatever 'private' choices may be agreed over the division of labour.

In the months of early motherhood I felt my 'feminist self' and my self as a new mother appeared to be in conflict. Indeed, eleven years on, the ambivalence that I feel is not resolved. The conflict did not come only from within but from domestic ideologies that are reproduced in policy, by professionals who work with mothers and children and by other mothers themselves. I could no longer distance myself from these oppressive ideologies in the way I had done prior to having children. In addition, with the exhaustion that comes from looking after a baby, I found myself feeling resentful that I had not had the opportunity to extend my maternity leave or to work part-time because I was the main earner. At this point I would have described myself as a 'reluctant breadwinner' (Charles and James, 2003: 246) feeling that I had been forced back to a full-time job before I was ready. As time went on I started to feel that it would be in our son's interests if I could be the primary carer as it was so difficult to go against the accepted way of doing things. My husband, for example, was reluctant to take our son to parent and toddler groups because these seemed to be largely exclusive to mothers. I began to be increasingly critical about my husband's style of childcare despite having seen shared care as the ideal egalitarian arrangement prior to becoming a mother.[vii] It seemed that I was beginning to internalise those ideologies that I had always questioned and that I was starting to act according to the rules of 'sensitive motherhood' (Walkerdine and Lucey, 1989) in order to be accepted in the places where women with young children go. I also started to feel that unless I played according to those rules that my son would lose out. It is also the case that as children mature that they start to socialise their parents as Barrie Thorne argues:

> Adults are said to socialize children, teachers socialize students, the more powerful socialize, and the less powerful get socialized. Power, indeed, is central to all these relationships, but children, students, the less powerful are by no means passive or without agency. As a parent and as an observer in schools, I have been impressed by the ways in which children act, resist, rework, and create; they influence adults as well as being influenced by them. (1993: 3)

Children, like adults, 'do gender' (Lorber, 1994) according to what they learn both inside and beyond the home. I have found that both my sons have developed their own 'gendered moral rationalities' (Duncan and Edwards, 1999) and these may be in tension with mine. The role of children's agency and influence in gender arrangements at home is worthy of further exploration. My sons frequently express a preference for me taking them to school and to out of school activities, for example, despite being used to shared care arrangements. In order to explore the dilemmas reflected here I sought refuge in sociology and in feminist literature on motherhood, in studies that appeared to help me relate my 'private trouble' to the 'public issue' (Mills, 1959) of motherhood, childcare and policy.

There were two studies that were particularly compelling and both can claim to be sources of inspiration for this research. The first of these is *Democracy in the Kitchen. Regulating Mothers and Socialising Daughters* (1989) by Valerie Walkerdine and Helen Lucey and referred to in Chapter One. Having been impressed with the study when it was first published I re-read it after Nicholas was born and their theorisation of 'sensitive mothering' helped me to interpret some of my own confusion. The second study is *Mothers and Their Children. A Feminist Sociology of Childrearing* (Ribbens: 1994). This is an ethnographic study of women with young children in which Ribbens explores their perspectives on childrearing. Having been particularly interested in ethnographic research in my teaching of research methods

and the sociology of education, I was compelled by the idea of developing an ethnographic study in relation to childcare that, like Ribbens' work, would place the voices of mothers centre-stage. At the same time my study is distinct in that I specifically wanted to find a way of mediating between how mothers 'do childcare' and the shifting policy landscape following the National Childcare Strategy (DfEE, 1998). There was scope to explore further the connections between the 'public' and the 'private' realms examined in Ribbens' study. I was particularly interested in evaluating policy from the standpoint of parents as they have rarely been represented directly on policy-making bodies in the field of childcare despite their 'rights' and 'responsibilities' (Home Office, 1998) being continuously articulated by New Labour.

In making my own childcare arrangements during the period in which childcare was being placed high on the political agenda I felt frustrated that policy did not seem to do justice to the daily stresses of balancing work, study and the needs of children. Nor did policy appear to engage fully with the gendered relations of care and the capacity of discourses of motherhood to inhibit efforts to move away from traditional family and care practices. This research emerged from my interest in how mothers coped with these issues. I anticipated their accounts could provide the basis for a critique of policy as well as being a source of support for me in exploring the questions that I was facing. As the research comes to a close I feel that I have been more successful in relation to the former goal (policy critique) than the latter (support in tackling the contradictions of motherhood). In Section Four I explore why the research failed to meet my hopes with regard to support from other mothers.

SECTION TWO: RESEARCHING CHILDCARE PRACTICES FROM A FEMINIST STANDPOINT.

In chapter one I explained that my research has been shaped by feminist standpoint theory, especially the standpoint approach articulated in the work of Dorothy Smith (1988; 1990a; 1990b; 1997). This provided the framework for connecting the personal accounts of the mothers with the 'relations of ruling' that shape childcare and family policy. More specifically, Smith's discussion of both the 'problematic of the everyday world' and 'institutional ethnography' (1988) encouraged me to plan the research with the following issues in mind:

- To take mothers' 'everyday' experiences of caring for children seriously; to select methods that would enable them to describe their work with regard to care of children according to their own perspectives and emotions.

- To explore these accounts of daily childcare practices as a starting point for understanding the *social relations* that shape them.

- To acknowledge the connections between state agencies, professional practices, discourses and ideologies that form specific 'institutions', described as 'a complex of relations forming part of the ruling apparatus' (Smith, 1988: 160).

- To utilise Smith's understanding of 'institutions' (1988) in relation to childcare and parenting practices, performed by individuals at the local, everyday level, yet shaped by this complex web of relations.

- To adapt the concept of 'work' to embrace care practice, mothers' relations with their children and their contribution in this context to supporting institutional relations. Smith (1988) develops the example of mothers' work in relation to the education system, but the concept is relevant to other arenas including childcare.

As Smith points out 'Notions of good mothering practices take no account of the actual material and social conditions of mothering work' (1988: 168). Institutional ethnography provides a means of analysing mothering work at the local level in relation to a complex web of social relations and institutional ideologies. This spoke to me as an ideal methodology for connecting mothering practices to shifting childcare policy agendas. These policy agendas form one part of this 'complex web' and must be located within it.

Whilst the method of institutional ethnography entailed starting from discussions with mothers, it will be evident that I needed a means for making sense of relevant policy agendas. As part of my exploration of childcare policy I have tried to establish how childcare is thought about and talked about in policy texts and how members of the policy-making community understand the significance of childcare in relation to social, political and economic goals. This methodology is based on analysis of public policies and strategies and interviews with relevant policy actors.

Critical analysis of the discourses embedded in policy was undertaken in order to expose the priorities, tensions and contradictions surrounding childcare and its interaction with other state agendas. The analysis of childcare policy in the UK and in Wales was based on a detailed search of relevant web-sites for policy documents[viii] and debates pertaining to the main policy arenas considered in Chapters 3 and 4. A critical reading of documentary evidence enabled me to reconstruct the development of policies around key themes such as childcare, gender equality, work- life balance and parenting support. It also enabled me to identify the key players and issues of concern within these policy arenas and to assess the extent to which the policy processes around childcare, parenting support, gender equality and social justice appeared to interact. Many of the issues raised through documentary analysis were then explored further in interviews with key players in regional and local policy arenas and with parents and grandparents.

More specifically, documents were analysed in relation to the concepts of 'framing' and the 'discursive opportunity structure' (Ball and Charles, 2006; Ferree, 2003; Naples, 2002). The framing concept was based originally on Goffman's (1974) *Frame Analysis* [ix] and has been of particular interest to scholars of social movements and collective action (Benford, 1997). Framing is broadly defined as 'signifying work or meaning construction' (Benford and Snow, 2000: 614) whilst frames 'help to render events or occurrences meaningful and thereby function to organize experience and guide action' (Benford and Snow, 2000: 614). Put another way, a frame may be viewed as an "interpretive package" (Ferree, 2003: 308) that draws from ideologies and discourses. Social movements may be engaged in framing processes as they struggle to give meaning to issues of concern. However, some

framings are more effective than others, and this is described by Benford and Snow (2000) as their degree of 'cultural resonance' in relation to the wider social values. Nevertheless, there has been concern that the concept of framing has failed to take on board the impact of power relations including the relationship of frames to dominant discourses (Ferree, 2003). In order to link framing processes with power relations it is necessary to locate 'the construction and interpretation of frames within the broader discursive and institutional context' (Naples, 2002: 244). The idea of the 'discursive opportunity structure' (Ferree, 2003) has been proposed in order to achieve this goal and can be defined as 'institutionally anchored patterns of interpretation' (Ferree, 2003: 309). On the basis of this framework I have analysed policy texts produced by state institutions in order to uncover their 'patterns of interpretation' in relation to childcare, gender equality and social justice. This provides the institutional and discursive context within which key players in the policy process, professionals and parents may construct their own ways of defining these issues. I have combined a critical reading of policy texts with discussions with policy actors that illuminate the degree to which 'master narratives' relating to childcare and related agendas are supported or contested.

It has also been helpful to approach policy texts as "attempts at persuasion" (Sparks, 1992) that represent a particular construction of social reality and particular frames may be deployed in order to make a policy more appealing to its audience. Yet it is possible for organisations and political actors with *competing* agendas to believe a particular policy fits with their specific political goals. In this sense policy frames can be read in relation to Murray Edelman's (1977) claims about the role of 'symbolic political language' in securing consensus. Edelman (1964; 1977) uses the idea of

'condensation symbols' that can be interpreted in competing ways so that they gain wide support- examples include concepts such as 'equality', 'justice', 'democracy'. A condensation symbol and related frame may obscure conflicting ideologies and the differential interests of those involved in the policy arena. One study identified condensation symbols in an analysis of Local Education Authority policies on anti-racist education (Troyna and Williams, 1986). In contrast to Troyna and Williams who argue that this deployment of symbols is deliberate, I believe this is often not the case, a view which Edelman's claims would support:

> There is no implication here that elites consciously mold political myths and rituals to serve their ends. Attempts at such manipulation usually become known for what they are and fail. What we find is social role taking, not deception. Potent condensation symbols, as already noted, are created through "living within the social texture"; this is notably true of political forms which become symbols. (1977: 20)

In later Chapters I will utilise the concepts of 'framing', the 'discursive opportunity structure' and 'condensation symbols' in my analysis of professional and political discourse in the field of parenting, childcare and work. In addition to identifying and unpacking the framing of childcare policy it is important to attend to the silences, tensions or omissions of policy. My research has sought to do this by drawing on my interviews with mothers, fathers and grandparents about how they 'do childcare' on a daily basis. Their accounts can provide an insight into how far their practices are shaped by dominant discourses around childcare and parenting, how those practices support those narratives, and where their perspectives point to gaps and tensions in emerging policy agendas. However, as I pointed out in Chapter One, developing a feminist standpoint implies more than simply documenting women's personal experiences and perspectives which are already socially embedded within the

'institutional' as explicated by Smith (1988). It is also necessary to take on the role of the 'outsider' (Atkinson, 1990) to expose the gendering of experience and the adoption of a 'feminist standpoint' provides a means to do this.

In maintaining a 'feminist standpoint' in my approach to policy analysis I have been guided especially by Catherine Marshall (1997; 2000) whose proposals sit alongside the framework offered by Smith (1988; 1990a; 1990b). Marshall has argued that traditional policy analysis has been based on models and methods that generally serve to support the *status quo* rather than to challenge it. In its place she offers a model of feminist critical policy analysis defined broadly as:

> ...research that conducts analyses *for* women while focusing on policy and politics. This perspective asks an often neglected question of every policy or political action: how is it affected by gender roles? (1997: 2)

In reading childcare policy texts the issue of gender roles is central to my analysis and feminist scholarship has been used to ask critical questions of policy and the arenas that shape it. According to Marshall, the role of the critical researcher can be to make the most of their role as an 'outsider' to policy arenas and examine the role of insiders in creating 'master narratives', how interests and values shape policy and how key stakeholders justify particular decisions:

> To move beyond the master narratives, to be critical, the analyst must *do* something, must report, act to enfranchise and to disrupt and dismantle oppressive policy directions. (Marshall, 1997: 10)

Thus it is possible to read policy texts with the intention to identify master narratives, to consider their implications for gender roles and to expose potentially harmful consequences. Marshall proposes some issues that should be central to feminist

critical policy analysis. These are presented in Box Two with a commentary of where those issues have informed my research:

BOX 2: FEMINIST CRITICAL POLICY ANALYSIS: EXPANDING POLICY QUESTIONS INDICATED IN MARSHALL, 1997: 18 TO 22.

Gender, the Public Sphere and Masternarratives

"Policy analysis and feminism intersect over questions about what is public and what is private and who decides" (1997: 18)

This is a continual theme throughout my research in terms of how policy texts and policy actors treat issues of care.

Counterpublics' Policy Issues

"Can there be policy analyses for non-dominants, for silenced issues, for marginalized populations?" (1997: 19)

In reading and discussing policy on childcare I am seeking to identify areas of silence in relation to the choices and needs expressed by parents. Furthermore, I try to tease out how far those areas of silence reflect gendered assumptions.

State Intervention

"For social justice, what is the role of the state? Can the state be relied upon for analyses of inequities? What are the related issues that surface when gender is the policy issue?" (1997: 19)

The role of the state in addressing issues of social justice and gender equality is examined with reference to childcare. Childcare provides a specifically important case in that it is associated with the family and domestic realm where issues of state intervention are especially contested.

'Outing' Symbolic Policy

"Feminist critical policy analyses see through symbolic inaction, suspicious of policy actors' rhetoric and policies with no enforcement." (1997:20)

This study is mainly concerned with identifying how childcare is framed in policy texts and by key policy actors. Even at the level of rhetoric alone, it is possible to identify tensions and silences in policy. However, the wider project also explores issues of delivery at the local level in contrasting communities.

Cautions about Simplistic Remedies

"Recognizing the embedded power relations in our institutions...requires a caution: traditional policy recommendations for remedies will not be applied in vacuums" (1997: 20).

This consideration is relevant where the feminist critical policy analyst is putting forward proposals for consideration by policy-makers. Marshall encourages us to take care if we are engaged in such an enterprise and to consider the possible consequences of any proposals that we make.

The Historical and Comparative Perspective and the Effects of Political/ Economic Shifts

"Overly focused and decontextualised policy analyses often miss historical, economic or cultural contexts that situate..." (1997: 21)

It is true that many studies in the realm of traditional policy analysis pay insufficient attention to the wider context leading to a technical and problem-solving orientation to policy issues. Through situating the research within literature in sociology, women's studies, and social policy, childcare policy is placed in comparative and historical perspective.

Moving Beyond Essentialising Labels

"Critical feminist analysis insists upon recognition of complexity- that the categories are mixed, have many elements that make up whole beings, and are not static but evolve. Analyses and recommendations, therefore, cannot simply aim at some universal target to fix *the* woman thing." (1997: 21).

This research seeks to examine how far childcare policy is sensitive to diversity of family circumstances and family preferences and how these may shift over the life course. It is also important to be critical of feminist voices within the community of policy actors if they only speak for specific groups (white, professional, educated) of women. The sample of parents was constructed to include mothers and fathers from different socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds in order to ensure a wide variety of voices were heard. However, it is also my belief that certain universal targets for childcare policy (for example, the recognition that unpaid care in the home constitutes work) are necessary to secure gains for women as a group.

Critiquing Bureaucracy, Leadership, Power and Community

Marshall encourages the feminist critical analyst to offer alternatives to traditional ways of operating and the conventional uses of power. Her examples are drawn from education but could be broadened to include other public and private arenas. She advocates the building of institutions that are 'nurturing' and are based on an 'ethic of care' (1997: 21).

The research draws on the literature that relates an 'ethic of care' (Kittay, 2001; F.Williams, 2001) to issues of parenting, childcare and families.

Searching for Belonging, for Meaningful Citizenship, and Altered Priorities

"Once the questions are widened to delve into making democracy and community real, *and* the master's tools/ master's house critique is surfaced, what organizations and politics are still viable, once the status of women question has status?" (1997: 22)

Here Marshall is continuing the theme of identifying alternatives in policy arenas. It is intended to explore devolution in Wales, the entry of femocrats into the Welsh Assembly and the willingness to take equality seriously through the Statutory Duty as a case study in trying to "do things differently". The extent to which this has enabled feminist policy agendas to surface will be examined.

Smith (1988; 1990b) refers to the significance of policy texts as a mode for mediating the interests of the ruling apparatus. Contemporary capitalist societies are based on relations of ruling in which texts play a distinctive role:

> Textually mediated discourse is a distinctive feature of contemporary society existing as socially organized communicative and interpretive practices intersecting with and structuring people's everyday worlds and contributing thereby to the social relations of the economy and of the political process. (Smith, 1990b: 163)

Smith offers the example of 'femininity' as a textual discourse that shapes and is shaped by social practices. In this instance Smith suggests that texts as various as magazines, advertisements and fashion displays form part of a discourse in which women may engage in social practices (talk, shopping, dressing up) that serve to "realize the textual images" (1990b: 163). In this way some of the everyday localized practices of (some) women are tied into a commercial process. Policy texts are part of a wider web of discursive and social relations and play a key part in the organisation of social action. One of the dominant textual discourses important for this research is that surrounding 'mothering' and policy texts may reinforce, reshape or challenge ideologies and discourses that shape mothering practices. In Chapter One I referred to the significance of childcare texts directed towards mothers in influencing the conduct of 'sensitive/ intensive mothering'. In this sense policy texts can be located within the framework of the 'institutional' networks of ruling and social relations referred to earlier and can be analysed as part of the method of 'institutional ethnography'.

In this section I have indicated how my methodology built on the conceptual framework developed in Chapter One. It is now appropriate to discuss the selection of methods, participants and case study areas.

SECTION THREE: THE RESEARCH PROCESS

My intention was to develop a feminist ethnography of family 'childcare strategies' and to explore their interconnections with public policies in the field of parenting and childcare. The sources of data and stages of the research process are outlined in Box 3:

BOX 3: KEY STAGES AND SOURCES OF DATA.

Stage One	Analysis of policy texts at national, regional and local levels of governance.
Stage Two	Identification of three wards within Swansea with contrasting socio-economic profiles. Development of a map of local early years, childcare and parenting support services through contact with local practitioners.
Stage Three	Development of a sample of mothers, fathers and grandparents in each ward through leafleting of local agencies and personal referrals.
Stage Four	Interviews with mothers, fathers and grandparents.
Stage Five	Development of a sample of regional and local policy actors in the childcare and parenting policy arena.
Stage Six	Semi-structured interviews with policy actors drawing on issues raised through policy analysis and discussions with mothers, fathers and grandparents.
Stage Seven	Analysis of data on ChildcareLink to compare Swansea with the other local government areas across Wales.
Stage Eight	Data analysis and writing up.

I will discuss the main sources of data in turn and outline the principles that guided my selection of methods, participants and locations.

Stage One: Analysis of Key Policy Texts

The analysis of key policy texts involved selection of various documents produced at different levels of governance including the national (UK), regional (Wales following devolution) and local (Swansea) levels. This analysis was initiated prior to fieldwork and has continued alongside writing up. The impact of feminist standpoint theory, institutional ethnography and the concepts of 'framing', 'the discursive opportunity structure' and 'condensation symbols' on the process of analysis has been explained in Section Two. Overall, I read texts with the following aims:

(a) To critically evaluate the content of childcare and parenting policy produced by the UK Government, the Welsh Assembly Government and key partnerships within the City and County of Swansea.

(b) To identify the key discursive frames and related condensation symbols used to package the childcare and parenting policy agendas.

(c) To assess claims that policy will progress gender equality and work-life balance, offer parental choice, extend support to parents and meet the interests of children

(d) To identify issues that could be explored further in my interviews with both policy actors and parents.

Stage Two: Mapping Local Provision in Three Electoral Wards

Early on in this research I decided that an ethnographic study of family childcare strategies could best be conducted through focused work in specific neighbourhoods. In this sense I anticipated that the study could be a contribution to the tradition of community studies (Bell and Newby, 1977; Davies and Jones, 2003; Rosser and Harris, 1965). This tradition has often placed an interest in family and kinship networks at the heart of the analysis (Charles and Davies, 2005; Devine and Heath, 1999). The focus of my study on childcare and parenting would be a basis from which to explore wider questions of social change, especially with regard to gender relations. It was, therefore, important to read personal accounts in the context of detailed knowledge of the communities in which participants lived. This would involve developing a picture of the local childcare market and other services for parents and children. Early years and childcare services vary considerably between local areas leading to an interest in the geographies of childcare (England, 1996; Holloway, 1998; Vincent *et al*, 2004a). The National Childcare Strategy in the UK has supported the continuation of local childcare markets (Dickens *et al*, 2005; Vincent and Ball, 2001) through a mixed economy of provision (Lewis, 2003). This has led to questions as to whether the reliance on the private-for-profit sector alongside limited public provision in the most deprived areas will deliver childcare for all (Land, 2002a; McDowell *et al*, 2005). In the selection of areas within Swansea it was important, therefore, to ensure I included those that would enable me to explore claims of polarization in childcare markets (McDowell *et al*, 2005) and to examine the impact of area based initiatives such as Sure Start. In addition the

evidence that 'gendered moral rationalities' (Duncan and Edwards, 1999) vary across geographical areas and are sustained through local social networks (Duncan and Smith, 2002) offered further support for my decision to focus my attention on one City (Swansea) and three areas within this City. Simon Duncan and Darren Smith argue that there is a 'geography of family formations' (2002: 31) and they provide evidence to support this at the regional level. They anticipate there will be further variation across local neighbourhoods and it is at this level that I wished to develop comparative data.

The research was thus conducted in three Electoral Divisions of Swansea West with contrasting socio-economic and ethnic profiles. The Divisions have been given pseudonyms and will be referred to as Crossland, Tinbury and Shaw. These areas contrast across a range of criteria such as type of housing and local amenities and their populations vary by occupational status, educational attainment, age profile, household composition and ethnic origin (City and County of Swansea, 2003a; 2003b; 2003c). Both Crossland Division and Tinbury Division had been designated as Communities First areas [x] and each was a base for Sure Start initiatives. In addition, Tinbury was placed as one of the highest out of the top one hundred most deprived wards in Wales and had a very high score on the child poverty index (City and County of Swansea, 2003d). Both Tinbury and Shaw were selected for personal reasons as well. I live on the border between the two areas and my children attended a playgroup and a school in the Shaw area. I wanted part of my research to be in an area where I was involved in local networks and facilities. Crossland Ward was selected because it is an area that is ethnically and religiously diverse with a relatively high proportion of Muslim families. The Minority Ethnic Women's

Network (MEWN) had conducted research in Swansea that indicated that the childcare needs of Muslim families were not being met (MEWN, 1998) and I wanted to pursue this issue in my own research. I had also made use of a parent and toddler facility at one of the primary schools in the area and I was aware that local practitioners were trying to encourage the greater participation of minority ethnic parents and children in early years and childcare provision. I wanted to explore how far childcare policy was capable of responding to diversity amongst families and the selection process was driven with this goal in mind. Further details of the profiles of each of these areas are provided in Appendix 1.

In each electoral Division I set up meetings with local practitioners in the field of early years education, childcare and parenting support in order to develop a map of local provision and to facilitate contacts with parents. In some cases these meetings took the form of an interview and were tape-recorded but in most cases practitioners were too busy to offer sufficient time for this and I focused on gathering basic information about service provision. These 'childcare maps' were intended to help me explore how childcare policy was changing the shape of local provision and to determine the level of local support for parents and children across a range of service areas.

Stages Three and Four: Interviews with Mothers, Fathers and Grandparents

The contacts with practitioners were also used as an opportunity to enlist their support in gaining access to parents who would be willing to be interviewed. I prepared a leaflet giving details about the research and inviting mothers, fathers and

grandparents involved in the regular care of at least one child under the age of eleven years [xi] to participate. Some practitioners agreed to circulate this to parents using their service and to let me know if anyone volunteered. Others invited me to drop in to their service at times when parents were present so that I could access parents directly. A copy of the leaflet is provided in Appendix 2. Although the main focus of the research was to be on mothers' accounts of their childcare practices I had decided that the research should also seek the perspectives of fathers and grandparents providing informal support for childcare. I had hoped to secure enough interest in the research to be in a position to draw up a sample according to particular criteria such as social class, age, ethnic origin and family composition. However, it soon became clear that the majority of parents were reluctant to participate in the study and I decided that I would need to interview everyone who volunteered.

As Fiona Devine and Sue Heath observe, 'qualitative methods have remained the predominant approach within sociological research on the family' (1999: 43). My intention was to develop an 'institutional ethnography' and Smith (1988) says this can draw on various methods of data collection. Whilst the method of participant observation has been particularly associated with ethnography it would have been difficult to use this method to study the private world of families (Ribbens, 1994). Ethnographic studies have been based on many types of research methods (Burgess, 1984) and I anticipated that the study would benefit from multiple sources of information (Burgess, 1984). Many feminist studies concerned with the private lives of women have been based on biographical methods (Roberts, 2002) such as life history interviews (Geiger, 1986; Ribbens, 1994) and diaries (Bell, 1998). Whilst these were attractive as sources of information on daily childcare practices they were

also methods that are time consuming and would rely on the willingness of participants to give considerable time to the research. I did not think that it was likely that many mothers of young children would have this time to spare. Hence, I decided to compromise by conducting 'childcare life histories' through semi-structured interviews. These interviews were conducted at a location chosen by the participant. Most mothers chose to be interviewed at home but a small number preferred the interview to take place in the public setting through which I had first contacted them such as a school or nursery. Only one of the mothers asked to be interviewed at her place of paid work. In contrast, none of the fathers was interviewed at home. They were either interviewed at their place of paid work or in a local community centre. The two grandmothers in the sample were interviewed at home.

Altogether I conducted individual interviews with 25 mothers, 6 fathers and 2 grandmothers. The interviews lasted between 40 minutes to 2 hours reflecting variability in the time that each participant had to spare and in their willingness to disclose personal information. I provide a reflexive account of the interview process in Section Four. In addition to the individual interviews I conducted two group interviews; one was with a group of four mothers using a local nursery and the other with a group of 8 fathers contacted through Sure Start. These had not been planned at the outset of the research but were suggested to me by local practitioners who felt parents were likely to feel more comfortable in a group setting. These interviews proved to be particularly illuminating in terms of my interest in the significance of gendered networks of support. Details about the characteristics of the sample are provided in Appendix 3.

The interviews covered a variety of key themes within the following areas of interest:

- About You and Your Family.
- Caring for Children: What Does it Involve and Who Does It?
- Using and Choosing Early Years and Childcare Provision.
- Managing Work, Education and Childcare.
- Perspectives on Policy and Services for Parents and Children.

Within this framework there was room for flexibility in the questions that were explored according to the circumstances of each participant. The complete list of questions can be found in Appendix 4. Participants were asked to give their consent to the discussion being tape-recorded and this was granted in all cases except one. These interviews were conducted during 2004, two years after the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) had announced its Childcare Action Plan (WAG, 2002a). Childcare policy continued to be developed by both the UK New Labour Government and by the Assembly (HM Treasury, 2004; WAG Childcare Working Group, 2004) as my fieldwork proceeded. The interviews were all transcribed and analysed using a thematic approach. All participants had been guaranteed anonymity and consequently have been given pseudonyms.

Stages Five and Six: Semi-structured interviews with key policy actors in childcare policy arenas at regional and local levels.

It was important to build on my reading of the public policy texts and my interviews with parents and grandparents through discussion with key policy actors. These participants were selected in order to gain insights at both regional level and at the local level and included those working across a range of relevant policy arenas. Fourteen individuals were interviewed and their details are provided in Appendix 5. The Welsh Assembly Government and the City and County of Swansea were the key regional and local arenas for exploring policy, but members of other relevant bodies with an interest in childcare, parenting support and equality matters were included. The Swansea Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership and Sure Start Partnership were both used as a route of access to relevant actors. I used a snowballing approach (O'Connell Davidson and Layder, 1994) in which I invited participants to identify other regional and local actors who were likely to offer a useful input into the research.

The information gathered from mothers, fathers and grandmothers helped to identify areas for discussion in my interviews with policy-makers. In this sense I sought to give a voice to parents in the research and this became especially important as it became evident that they were not represented on policy-making bodies. It was for this reason that I chose to interview policy-makers in the final stages of the research following fieldwork with parents. Interviews were based around discussion of some

key themes and were tape-recorded. A list of the key themes is provided in Appendix 6.

Stage Seven: Comparative Analysis of Local Early Years Development and Childcare Services Across Wales.

In order to explore variability of services for parents and children across Wales and to assess where the City and County of Swansea is placed as one local child daycare regime (Randall, 2004) it has been possible to access information using ChildcareLink [xii]. Given the delayed and more limited participation of Wales in this initiative in comparison to England and Scotland, the information must be treated cautiously. However, each local Children's Information Service (CIS) in Wales provides some information via this link enabling some comparative analysis of the progress made in each area in the development of children's services including childcare.

In this section of the Chapter I have outlined the main sources of data that have been used in my analysis. The different types of information gathered have enabled me to locate parents' diverse experiences in relation to the claims of policy texts; and to explore policy in practice and examine policy loopholes with practitioners and policy actors.

SECTION FOUR: REFLECTIONS ON DOING RESEARCH INTO CHILDCARE PRACTICES

There is a substantial literature on the principle of reflexivity in social research and feminist standpoint theorists place value on adopting reflexive methodologies (Mann and Kelley, 1997). However, reflexivity is not confined to feminist research and has been particularly well developed in qualitative research of various kinds (Atkinson *et al*, 2001; Finlay, 2002; Gergen and Gergen, 2000). The adoption of a reflexive approach to research is based on recognition that knowledge is socially constructed and the research process is an inherently social enterprise. Hence, it is important for the knowledge that is produced by research to be placed in context, for the researcher to make the process transparent and to engage in critical reflection about their role, their relationships with participants and the impact of their values on the process. In adopting a feminist standpoint, the researcher does not claim to adopt a neutral or disinterested approach, on the contrary, issues of biography, political commitment and power come centre stage. In turn this raises questions about the purpose of research, who research is for and its relationship to social change (Fine *et al*, 2000; Hammersley, 2000).

Within the social sciences generally there is considerable interest amongst social researchers in the ethical and political dilemmas that may confront them (Ball, 1991; Halpin and Troyna, 1994; Hood *et al*, 1999). This goes hand in hand with arguments that researchers should provide reflexive accounts of problems encountered during the process of doing research (Bell and Newby, 1977; Bell and Roberts, 1984;

Walford, 1987). The publication in 1981 of *Doing Feminist Research* edited by Helen Roberts was significant for highlighting the variety of ethical issues encountered by feminist social researchers. Whilst feminist social researchers take ethical questions seriously it cannot be claimed that this makes feminist social research distinctive. Some of the ethical concerns of feminists with regard to the treatment of women as research participants, for example, are comparable to those of researchers exploring other aspects of oppression based on age, social class, 'race' and ethnicity or sexuality (Connelly and Troyna, 1998; Hood *et al*, 1999). Some social researchers have argued that instead of focusing research around the needs of oppressed groups in society it is more productive to base research on fundamental *values* such as social justice and equality (Troyna, 1993). Morwenna Griffiths (1998), for example, considers feminist and anti-racist approaches within a wider framework of research for social justice. This seems to offer potential for ensuring that feminist research respects diversity amongst women whilst taking this beyond a celebration of multiple viewpoints to an understanding of the materialist basis to oppression. A feminist standpoint approach that seeks to understand and change power relations for women in diverse circumstances may be seen as contributing to research for social justice.

It is common for reflexive accounts of research to include an autobiographical account and autobiography plays an important role in some feminist research (Ellis and Bochner, 2000; Stanley, 1992; Tedlock, 2000). As Gayle Letherby explains:

> this approach essentially starts from the aim of making sociological sense of the self- one's own history, development and biography- and in locating oneself in social structures, to understand those structures and extrapolate from this to try to understand and respect others' experiences, feelings and social locations. (2003: 1)

I have already explained that my decision to embark on research with mothers about childcare had emerged from my own experience and my reflections are offered in Section One. There is no doubt that motherhood has had a profound impact on my values, my friendships, my material circumstances, my health and my paid work. In seeking to do my best for my children there are times when I have to make compromises and maintain silences that I would never have imagined before I became a mother. These result from the social conditions of motherhood. In this sense Dorothy Smith's (1988) compelling account of how the 'relations of ruling' enter into our everyday lives spoke to me directly. At this point I want to move on to consider how my identity as a mother and my intense emotional investment in this research topic impacted on the research process.

At the beginning of this research I had expected that my role as a mother would be an advantage and would provide an interesting contrast to my previous research interests. These were mainly around issues of racial inequality and cultural diversity in education (Ball and Beckford, 1997; Ball and Troyna, 1989). This previous research had always raised issues for me as a white researcher exploring issues of racism (Ball, 1991; 1992). In contrast I would truly be an 'insider' (Atkinson, 1990; Devine and Heath, 1999) in this research. I had expected this would improve the quality of my research relationships, my ability to empathise with regard to the experiences and circumstances of the mothers and my approach to making sense of the data. However, in practice my interviews with the mothers have been more difficult and more challenging than anything encountered in previous research. I was not prepared for this but in retrospect it makes perfect sense. The social conditions of motherhood were simultaneously central to the topic for my research, the inspiration

for my interests in this area and a potential barrier to arriving at valid accounts of the participants' feelings and experiences. This paradox will be explored further in my reflections on the research process. Whilst the research involved a variety of methods of data collection I will confine my reflections here to my interviews with the mothers; it was this aspect of the research that was the most emotionally charged for me.

(a) The interview context.

The research topic was one that entailed an intrusion into the private lives of families and this raised specific ethical questions (Edwards 1993; Ribbens and Edwards, 1998) as well as posing a challenge in doing ethnographic research. As the research progressed I became increasingly aware that childcare practices represent a highly sensitive topic (Renzetti and Lee, 1993) for many mothers. My research with mothers employed a semi-structured interview schedule with the goal of collecting a childcare life history. The transition to motherhood and the evolution of particular childcare practices over time was the focus. However, the first problem that I encountered was that of gaining access and consent to an interview. I had expected that the topic of childcare would arouse considerable interest amongst mothers and that they would enjoy having an opportunity to talk about it. In practice it was very difficult to persuade people to take part in the research and involved repeated visits over several months to schools, after-school clubs, day nurseries and other places where mothers go, to generate a sample. It is difficult to know why gaining access was so difficult. However, where people gave a reason for refusal it was generally on the grounds that they were simply too busy looking after young children and meeting

other responsibilities. It was those social conditions that were of specific interest to me that contributed to problems of access.

Problems in gaining access were especially difficult in one of the three areas selected for the research, Tinbury. This is an area with significant levels of poverty and social disadvantage and is an area designated for support from the Assembly's Communities First programme. Whilst I made links with various agencies providing support and services for families in the area, local practitioners stressed that I was unlikely to get much co-operation from parents, as they faced a struggle themselves in gaining their trust and in encouraging them to use local services. This advice proved to be correct meaning that it took me several months to generate a sample of nine parents (all mothers) and two group interviews, one with mothers and another with fathers. It was common for the parents in this area to agree to an interview and then either not turn up or be away from home at the agreed time or to change their minds about participating. It is possible that in my role as a University researcher that some of the parents placed me in a similar location to the social workers, health visitors and Job Centre Advisors that have a presence in the area and did not feel that I could be trusted.

Lisa Bostock (2002) explores some of the problems that she faced in her interviews with mothers on low incomes about caring for their children. Bostock argues that there may be particular problems in researching mothers who are in difficult material circumstances about their childcare practices given that these mothers may be especially vulnerable to stress, depression and tiredness, and, in turn, it is assumed this could put their children at risk. Similarly, Buchbinder and Eisikovits (2004)

suggest ethical dilemmas in their research with abused women where some of their parenting practices could be seen as questionable. For Bostock, this raises a potential dilemma for the researcher between respecting confidentiality and protecting children. In her case she chose to tackle this dilemma through the use of a child protection protocol that was explained to the mothers at the beginning of the interview. I could not imagine how this approach could assist in securing positive research relations. This would have implied that my interest was in the surveillance of mothers rather than in doing research that would disrupt the practice of 'mother-blaming'.

It was often those mothers who were in difficult material circumstances who seemed to have a heightened awareness of issues relating to child safety and a distrust of formal childcare because people they did not know would run it. Hence, I would support Bostock's conclusions that it would be wrong to assume that poor mothers pose a greater risk to their children because 'child protection was already integral to their caring routines' (2002: 281). She argues that we need to understand child protection 'in terms of structural rather than individual issues' (Bostock, 2002: 281) meaning that mothers in poor material circumstances will face greater problems in keeping their children safe and in maintaining their well-being. This is an important issue because poor mothers are especially vulnerable to arguments that pathologise their caring practices (Krane and Davies, 2000; Scourfield, 2001) and that are implicit in some Sure Start programmes and other area-based anti-poverty programmes. As Danielle Turney (2000) argues, social work practitioners may engage in 'mother-blaming' and the concept of 'neglect' is socially constructed and framed in relation to the gendered nature of care. This was certainly evident in some

(but not all) of my discussions with professionals and voluntary workers during the research.

Whilst, the foregoing argument that we should focus on material conditions rather than individual capabilities can be maintained in my approach to data analysis, it was more difficult to know how to work with it during the research in terms of my interaction with participants. There was a tension in that I was uncomfortable where my discussions with some people working in the area seemed to be couched in terms of blaming mothers rather than the conditions of poverty, yet I did observe some childcare practices which made me feel uncomfortable. These may be rooted in the material conditions of some women's lives that make the care of children highly stressful, that assume that it is primarily women's responsibility to protect children and means that they have to cope without adequate support. Nevertheless, this issue can present very difficult ethical dilemmas for researchers in terms of personal interaction with participants.

Some of my interviews were with mothers who were under considerable pressure and seemed to be depressed. These social conditions of motherhood were part of what I hoped my research could illuminate with the intention of drawing out their implications for childcare policy. Nevertheless, it was frustrating not to be able to offer more immediate support and I was aware that sometimes my questions had pulled some of their feelings of frustration and unhappiness to the fore. These dilemmas are likely to confront all researchers seeking to study personal, sensitive and potentially intrusive aspects of people's lives. There is considerable interest in

these matters in relation to debates about 'trust' and 'risk' in the research enterprise (Crozier, 2003; Sinding and Aronson, 2003).

It also proved difficult to encourage some of the mothers to give sufficient time to the interview and to reflect at length on my questions. The participants were often literally trying to manage the care of young children during the interview and were generally stressed as a result. Many of my questions were cut short as participants responded to their children's needs. Often they would try to occupy their children through use of the television and this made the recording (and subsequent transcription) of many of the interviews difficult. However, as a guest in their home I felt that it would be insensitive to ask them to switch the television off. I was aware that had our roles been reversed that I too would have had to resort to this in order to get some space to give an interview! The choice facing me was between a noisy disjointed interview or none at all. However, in accordance with the principles of ethnographic research, these interview conditions provided an opportunity to observe the world of other mothers with young children, to understand their coping strategies and to appreciate how difficult it can be to reflect on decisions about childcare at all. Nevertheless, these interview conditions did raise important ethical issues for me in that I often felt that in requesting an interview, in asking personal, possibly intrusive questions, that I was merely adding to the pressures on the mothers for little in return. These ethical dilemmas were especially acute for those interviews where it was apparent that the mother was socially isolated, depressed or facing difficult material circumstances. In a small number of cases the mother had separated from their child's father very recently. Whilst this may have had significant implications for their childcare arrangements and was directly relevant to the research, I did not feel

that I could pursue the issue unless the mother herself chose to refer to it. Crozier (2003) reports a similar unease in her interviews with black parents about asking mothers bringing up their child alone about the father.

(b) Taking childcare for granted.

Questions around mothering, care and domestic labour pose challenges in conducting interviews because of their association with the 'natural' abilities of women. As Jane Ribbens observes mothering occupies an 'intensely moral space' (1998: 32). Smith (1988) points out, caring practices are taken for granted and do not count as work. Indeed, the practices of mothers are so 'taken-for-granted' that often participants were quite taken aback by some of my questions. They had never been asked before *why* they decided to organise childcare and domestic arrangements in a particular way nor did they perceive caring for children as 'work'. Many of the mothers could not discuss their decisions about the balance between paid work and care or the distribution of domestic labour through the language of 'choice' as they often perceived their situation as one that had evolved naturally. This simultaneously presented a difficulty for me in encouraging the mothers to reflect on their circumstances whilst also confirming what feminist sociology has to tell us about the conditions of motherhood and the status of care (Glenn *et al*, 1994; Hays, 1996).

The problems that I encountered in persuading the mothers to reflect on 'taken-for-granted' aspects of their lives have been encountered in other studies of intimate relationships, as Jane Ribbens observes with regard to her research with mothers about their child-rearing practices:

> As I reflected on the sorts of talk about children I was used to hearing amongst mothers in my everyday life, I began to realise just how much is generally left out of conversations....I began to wonder whether mothers, in their everyday conversations with each other, generally steer clear of the deeper underlying ideologies of childrearing, focusing instead on the apparently more superficial but safer- issues of the 'trivia' of daily life with children. (1994: 42)

I experienced a similar problem in my interviews. Where I encouraged the mothers to reflect directly on how gender may impact on the roles and responsibilities taken by mothers and fathers, it was especially difficult to elicit any considered responses and many seemed to perceive my questions as either amusing, strange or threatening. In my interview with Stella, a white mother, married with one child, and working part-time in the health service this gap in our perceptions is illustrated in the following extract from the transcript:

Could you say a little bit about why you organise the care of your daughter like that? Why do you take the main responsibility for looking after (child)?

Well, because he (*husband*) is working full-time, I just feel he is more tired than me. Even though I'm working two nights and I don't sleep before or after, other than those two hours. I just feel he works harder than what I do.

So, it is really the practicalities of work?

Yes, I mean he's a (manual worker), so obviously he is lifting (heavy goods) and he needs all the energy he has got for that.

What do you most enjoy of all the things we have looked at? Is there any aspect of looking after your (child) that you particularly like?

Mmm **(searching for an answer)** ..well, she is growing up and I can teach her a lot more, like she wants to learn something all the time and I'm there to answer her questions.

And is there anything you don't particularly enjoy?

No, I just take it all in my stride! **(sounds surprised at the question, obviously doesn't think in these terms).**

So, you just see it all as what you have to do?

Yes! **(laughter)**

In terms of the routines that you have described, and how they fit around work, is there anything ideally that you'd like to change about them if you could?

No, not really, I'm quite happy with everything. **(again, seems bewildered that I should be asking such questions)**

So, do you feel that it's a routine that works for you?

Yes, I'm quite happy with it.

Would you say that your way of managing care, where you are doing most of it, while he is working most of the time, would you say this is typical of families with young children now?

Yes.

Why do you think that is?

Well, the bloke goes out to work, isn't it, like they are the main wage earner.

So, you are saying it is really dictated by work?

Yes.

Speaking more generally, I'm interested in whether those roles are changing for men and women or whether they are very much staying the same as they were for our parents, the older generation. Do you feel the roles of mothers and fathers have changed?

Can't get an answer-seems a bit confused.

Do you think, for example, that it is possible for women and men to share the care of their children equally?

I suppose if they want to yes but I'm quite happy with what I'm doing, you know.

(seems to be taking the questions as a personal criticism, sounding quite defensive and annoyed)

Whilst I had embarked on the research with the hope that as a mother interviewing other mothers there would be opportunity to develop shared understandings and critical insights based on personal experience, it will be clear that this was more difficult than I had planned. I have tried to interpret my experiences of mothering through a sociological lens from the beginning, but for most mothers there is enormous pressure to view the care of children as natural and enjoyable:

> (T)he predominant image of the mother in white Western society is of the ever-bountiful, ever-giving, self-sacrificing mother....a mother who lovingly anticipates and meets the child's every need. She is substantial and plentiful; she is not destroyed or overwhelmed by the demands of her child. Instead she finds fulfilment and satisfaction in caring for her offspring.[xiii]

In this context it is understandable why a majority of the mothers hesitated when I asked them what they did not enjoy about looking after their children. Many were unable or reluctant to offer a response, even after I had shared some examples from my own experience.

Marjorie L.DeVault (1996) points out that some of the early debates around feminist methodology tended to emphasize the prospects for positive interaction where women were researching other women. Opportunities to develop trust and empathy from a shared experience of oppression were suggested. However, it is now widely recognized that these research relations may be fraught with difficulties (De Vault, 1996; Maynard and Purvis, 1994). I explore this issue further below.

(c) Research roles and relationships- working with diversity.

In situations where feminists have been carrying out research that focuses on women there have been concerns to use methods that enable a dialogue rather than a 'top-down' approach controlled by the researcher (Finch, 1984; Smith, 1996; Oakley, 1981). Ann Oakley (1981) raises these issues in reflecting on her experience of interviewing women about pregnancy, childbirth and motherhood. She found that textbook advice available at this time on the proper conduct of interviews was not helpful and conflicted with her commitment to establishing a non-hierarchical and sensitive relationship with the women who were interviewed:

> ...in most cases, the goal of finding out about people through interviewing is best achieved when the relationship of interviewer and interviewee is non-hierarchical and when the interviewer is prepared to invest his or her own personal identity in the relationship. (Oakley, 1981: 41)

Similarly, Janet Finch, following her interviews with clergmen's wives and playgroup leaders, claimed that the woman-to woman interview has a special quality:

> ....being 'placed' as a woman has the additional dimension of shared structural position and personal identification which is, in my view, central to the special character of the woman-to-woman interview. (1984: 78)

According to Finch, the ease with which women are prepared to share personal experiences with a woman interviewer makes them vulnerable to manipulation, raising ethical issues for the feminist researcher.

It is now over two decades since these papers were published and research methods textbooks are more sensitive to questions about power and control in research relationships (Devine and Heath, 1999; O'Connell Davidson and Layder, 1994). However, I have referred to these widely quoted accounts of feminist interviewing because they have the potential to highlight some of the complex problems in how feminists deal with these ethical questions. Furthermore, Oakley's commitment to achieving equality, trust and empathy was something that I hoped to be able to respect in my interviews with mothers in ways that had not been possible in my previous research. I have never adopted the view that feminist research should be confined to women researching other women or that relationships in these circumstances would necessarily be pleasurable (Phoenix, 1994). Nevertheless, I felt that 'reciprocity' was more likely than in my previous work asking policy-makers and professionals about their commitment to race equality. I was prepared to invest my own identity as a mother in the relationship and respond openly to personal questions. Rosalind Edwards(1993) went further than this in her research with

mature mother-students. She sought to engage in 'self-disclosure' about her own experiences in order to encourage the women to share their feelings. In contrast, Gill Crozier (2003) has reported that in her research with black parents, she was willing to discuss her own experiences as a parent and share her personal views, yet often this was not appropriate:

> I did find in interviews with the black mothers that at times when I started to share my experiences I sensed that these were not wanted. This was 'her story', 'her space', 'her voice'. Sharing stories and experiences is an aspect of a developing relationship; only friends 'share' stories. (2003: 88)

I encountered some similar responses to this in my interviews. Many of the mothers did not wish the interview to be conducted along the lines of a conversation between friends, as implied in Oakley's recommendations. In the interview extract with Stella (see previous section) I was struggling to find a shared language from which to explore her perceptions of gender roles but it was clear that we approached these issues from different locations. For some, this was because they wanted to get the interview over with as soon as possible, perhaps perceiving my efforts to empathise as only prolonging matters. There were others who seemed to enjoy the opportunity to talk about their personal circumstances but this did not mean that they were interested in my own experiences. This contrasted with accounts that continue to be published by other feminist researchers of developing warm, friendly relationships with the women that they interview. Susan Smith, for example, claims that in her interviews with women in Further and Adult Education, they arrived at a 'shared universe of meaning' (1996: 64). I could not describe any of my interviews in such rosy terms and this continued to vex me throughout the research.

In seeking to achieve equality, trust and reciprocity in research we need to remain sensitive to power differences between women as well as what unites us (Glucksmann, 1994). The only thing that I had in common with many of the mothers was that we shared the status of motherhood. Differences of social class, ethnicity, age, sexuality and professional status mean that we cannot assume relationships will be non-hierarchical. Furthermore, whilst the research grew out of an explicitly feminist approach to understanding motherhood and childcare, there were very few mothers who appeared to share feminist values and in some cases appeared to hold views in active opposition to those values (Luff, 1999). Indeed, I chose not to disclose my interests in feminist research to the mothers in case this was perceived as threatening. I also sought to play down the extent to which my husband and myself seek to share childcare and domestic labour where I felt this was likely to prevent the mothers being open about their own arrangements. In order to gain their trust I played a particular role in which I emphasized my identity as a mother over other sources of identity. I was aware that I was 'play-acting' to secure maximum co-operation, a practice that other researchers in the field of parenting have reported (Vincent and Warren, 2001) and which serves as a reminder that mothers do not all share the same location. Indeed, in reflecting on her research into women's work, Miriam Glucksmann (1994) also reports on the need to play a part and concludes that 'I suspect that being a credible actor must be a part of all qualitative interviewing' (1994: 162).

In exploring issues of difference and diversity amongst women and how these may impact on research roles and relationships, I had anticipated that the interviews with white, middle-class women in professional roles would flow more easily because of

our shared circumstances and social location. Whilst there were wide variations overall in the quality of the interviews, I was surprised to find that 'similarity' could be a barrier to research in this area whilst 'difference' often helped to open up the discussion. The interviews with men, with grandparents and, most strikingly, with the Bangladeshi mothers in my sample were much easier to conduct and often led to deeper insights than those with the white, professional mothers living in the same area of Swansea as myself. There seem to be two factors that may help explain this. First, motherhood is linked to issues of self, identity and competence for women (Ribbens, 1994) leading to the potential for competition between mothers and feelings that their skills are being judged. It seems possible that this competition may be enhanced between mothers of a similar background leading to a situation where those mothers from a comparable background to myself felt that their choices and mothering skills were being evaluated. In Chapter One I referred to the concepts of 'sensitive mothering' (Walkerdine and Lucey, 1989) and 'intensive mothering' (Hays, 1996) to make sense of the pressures on mothers to demonstrate their commitment to their children. Given these pressures it is hardly surprising that (some) mothers may become uncomfortable in an interview that seeks to get to the heart of how they feel about and go about the practice of childcare. It is possible that the women from middle-class, professional backgrounds who may have had more exposure to arguments around equality and work-life balance in their workplace would feel particular pressure in being interviewed by a mother combining childcare with postgraduate study. In the following extract from my interview with Becky, it appears that she perceives that she may be open to criticism for preferring to stay home with her children. Becky was a white, middle-class mother living in the same area of Swansea as myself with three young children. She had been a Civil Servant

who had been able to take extended unpaid leave but retained a choice to return to her work once her children were all in school. Nevertheless, she felt that it was unlikely that she would ever return as she preferred being at home:

> I enjoy most of it! It is very demanding, very, very demanding. I think I am much busier than actually going out to work for an employer...Out of the two I prefer to be with the children. And I always had the intention that when the children did come along, that if we could afford it, I would like to be with them. *And I don't think there is anything wrong with that.* (Becky, my emphasis)

Fathers and grandparents face different pressures around childcare to those faced by mothers and this would help to explain why I found these interviews to be more open and relaxed. My interviews with the Bangladeshi mothers also seemed to flow more easily and they seemed to be less concerned with presenting me with an idealised portrait of their circumstances. I carried out interviews with 5 mothers (and one father) who described their ethnic origin as Bangladeshi and their religion as Islam. In contrast to some of the interviews with white mothers that had proved very difficult, all of the interviews with these mothers were very informative, detailed and relaxed. They all seemed to enjoy using me as a confidante and telling me about themselves. The role of white researchers in conducting research with members of minority ethnic groups has been a topic of considerable debate in social research (Lawrence, 1982; Mirza, 1998; Phoenix, 1994; Troyna with Carrington, 1993). This is part of a debate about the potential benefits of symmetry between a researcher and research participants with regard to their social location (Vincent and Warren, 2001). Speaking from a black feminist standpoint, Mehreen Mirza argues that South Asian women have often been portrayed in stereotypical ways by social researchers so that they are 'often made invisible or are constructed as 'other' in research, as well as 'dehumanized' and 'pathologized' in the research process' (1998: 80). Whilst I do

not take the view that it is impossible for white feminist researchers to develop positive relationships with women from minority ethnic backgrounds, I had not anticipated that our different social locations would emerge as an advantage.

I am reluctant to speculate on the reasons for this situation other than to acknowledge that taking the role of an 'outsider' in relation to a research group may sometimes help to open up discussion. Indeed, this point has long been recognised in anthropological and ethnographic research. This is an issue explored by Martyn Hammersley and Paul Atkinson who advise:

> ...it is an important requirement of ethnography that we suspend a wide range of common-sense and theoretical knowledge in order to minimize the danger of taking on trust misleading preconceptions about the setting and the people in it.
> (1983: 89)

It may help to maintain a creative tension between being a 'stranger' and a 'friend', to encourage people to account for routine actions that may be unfamiliar to the researcher (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983). As Carol Vincent and Simon Warren observe in their research with parents, it is not "self-evident that a close identification between researcher and respondent is necessarily a "good thing". It may mean that one of the pair will assume what is known and understood between them" (2001: 44). In addition, whilst the women varied considerably in their personal circumstances, they all appeared to have a strong sense of identity as Muslim women and, for some, as part of local family, religious and community networks and they drew my attention to where this impacted on their caring practices. It is possible that these support structures in which care was shared with other women meant that they felt less vulnerable and more confident about the issues that we were discussing than

other mothers. This valued social and emotional support illustrates claims about the importance of social and emotional capital (Reay, 2005) in gendered social networks.

In her research with female mature students, Rosalind Edwards (1993) (a white researcher) faced some difficulties in securing the agreement of black women to an interview. Where she did manage to persuade them to take part, she found it helpful to acknowledge openly that they differed in terms of ethnicity and this might influence her ability to understand their experiences. Hence, it was the acceptance of 'difference' that gained their trust, rather than an effort to contrive shared experience on the basis of gender. Similarly, in seeking the consent of the Bangladeshi mothers to be interviewed, I stressed that I was particularly interested in ensuring my research reflected the experiences of minority ethnic women and finding out whether local services were sensitive to their religious and cultural needs. It is possible that this acknowledgement of and regard for 'difference' helped to secure their interest and their capacity to describe the minutiae of their daily lives. They could place me as an 'outsider' and 'acceptable incompetent' (Lofland, 1971) whilst this was more difficult for those mothers who were more similar to me with regard to social class, ethnicity and professional status.

CONCLUSION: TOWARDS AN INSTITUTIONAL ETHNOGRAPHY OF CHILDCARE?

In this chapter I have provided an account of the research methodology that I used to develop an ethnography of local childcare practices and provision located within an understanding of 'the institutional' networks of power and everyday social relations

suggested by Smith (1988). I have situated the research process in relation to biographical matters and my conceptual framework. In providing a reflexive account of the research process with regard to my interviews with mothers I have tried to illustrate how the emotional and political questions that inspired the research were sometimes a barrier to discussion. Yet by exploring why this was the case I am reminded that the conceptual framework introduced in Chapter One provides the clue. This brings me full circle to an appreciation of feminist work on the social conditions of motherhood and the gendered moral imperative to care which women may face. This is so deeply morally and socially embedded that it can be difficult to explore, supporting Smith's claims that the daily practices of women are tied into powerful discourses and relations of ruling.

CHAPTER THREE

SUPPORTING PARENTS? NEW LABOUR FAMILY POLICY AND THE NATIONAL CHILDCARE STRATEGY.

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I will examine those spheres of policy introduced since New Labour took office in 1997 that are directed towards supporting families and the care of young children. Through this I intend to provide a picture of the 'relations of ruling' (Smith, 1988) that may shape the 'childcare strategies' (Windebank, 1999) of the mothers and fathers in my study. In Section One I will discuss the National Childcare Strategy and place it within the context of other New Labour policy agendas. In Section Two I will provide a review of current academic and political debates about the New Labour project in relation to supporting families and explore the empirical research into how policy is shaping family childcare practices. In Section Three I will identify some questions for further investigation on the basis of this policy review. The policy review will draw on the concepts of 'framing' (Benford and Snow, 2000), the 'discursive opportunity structure' (Ball and Charles, 2006; Ferree, 2003) and 'condensation symbols' (Edelman, 1964) introduced in Chapter Two. In my analysis of policy texts my interest is in the discursive framing of childcare and related agendas and the deployment of specific 'condensation symbols' which are linked to the discursive frames but comprise short-hand ways of referring to and gaining support for a particular frame. This conceptual framework also links with

Smith's (1990b) emphasis on the *textual* mediation of discourses in contemporary society and I argue that policy documents produced by state institutions play a role in this process of mediation.

Following my interest in utilising feminist standpoint theory (Smith, 1988; Collins, 1997) and 'critical feminist policy analysis' (Marshall, 1997; 2000) an investigation into the discourses embedded in policy is undertaken in relation to concerns over gender equality, social justice and understandings of motherhood. Jan Windebank (1999), drawing on Borchorst (1990) [xiv], argues that the concept of 'political motherhood' can be used to describe understandings of mothering implicit in state policies and institutional frameworks. Childcare policy can be understood as a crucial component within this wider array of policies. Hence, the concept can be used to guide comparative research into different welfare regimes on the relationship between gender, paid work and care and, more specifically, the childcare strategies pursued by parents. I will utilise this concept to tease out macro-level understandings of motherhood in New Labour policy to place alongside the ideology of 'sensitive/ intensive mothering' (Walkerdine and Lucey, 1989; Hays, 1996) and 'gendered moral rationalities' (Duncan and Edwards, 1999) introduced in Chapter One. What is particularly important is that changing definitions of 'political motherhood' may be in tension with the expectations of mothers embraced by 'sensitive/ intensive mothering' and 'gendered moral rationalities'. This framework is also extended to explore how the roles of fathers and children are constructed within policy.

SECTION ONE: NEW LABOUR'S FRAMING OF CHILDCARE POLICY.

Childcare policy connects with a wide variety of public agendas and areas of service delivery. Since the New Labour Government was first elected in 1997 many new areas of social policy have emerged which impact on the relationship between the welfare state, parents and children (Croft and Carabine, 2001). Of particular interest is the trend towards a more *explicit* approach to family and childcare policy (Driver and Martell, 2002; Lewis, 2003; Maclean, 2002). Jane Lewis refers to the 'historical reluctance of UK governments to develop an explicit policy on childcare' (2003: 219); a reluctance that rested on the view that childcare was a 'family concern' (Scott, 1998) and that 'mother-care' was best for children. In this context, New Labour social policies reflect a turning point in how childcare is framed in relation to gender, parenting and the needs of children; a shift in the construction of 'political motherhood' (Windebank, 1999). In May 1998 the UK Government announced the National Childcare Strategy (DfEE, 1998) in the inter-departmental Green Paper, *Meeting the Childcare Challenge. A Framework and Consultation Document* and in October the Green Paper *Supporting Families* (Home Office, 1998) was also issued for consultation. Both papers reflect some of the wider priorities of New Labour in relation to combating poverty, promoting social inclusion and investing in children (Millar, 2003). Taken together these proposals introduced a wide variety of initiatives that may impact on parents' childcare strategies and the conduct of parenting more generally. I identify their key priorities below.

(a) The National Childcare Strategy

In May 1998 the Government published the plans for a National Childcare Strategy (DfEE, 1998). This was the outcome of collaboration between the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, the Secretary of State for Social Security and the Minister for Women, thus providing an indication of the range of policy agendas and parts of Government with a stake in the childcare arena. The main issues for attention covered in these plans will be presented in the Box below:

BOX 4: A SUMMARY OF *MEETING THE CHILDCARE CHALLENGE* (DfEE, 1998)

Why a National Childcare Strategy is Needed.

- Parents and children need support and the Strategy is presented as one element of a wider package of supportive measures.
- Changing patterns of work including an increase in mothers returning to paid employment mean that families may not be able to rely entirely on parental care.
- Changing family patterns mean that informal sources of care may not be available, although it is recognised that many parents may prefer informal care.
- Lone parents may need formal childcare if they are to return to work or education.

Current Gaps in Childcare Services.

- The *quality* of childcare is variable and different providers have to meet different requirements and in many settings employ childcare workers lacking formal qualifications.
- Childcare is not *affordable* for many parents.
- Childcare may not be *accessible* for many reasons including insufficient places to meet demand in some areas and gaps in information for parents seeking childcare.

Proposals to Tackle the Gaps in Childcare.

Raising the quality of care by:

- The integration of early education and childcare;
- The establishment of Early Excellence Centres;
- Improved support for parents and informal carers;
- Review of the regulations relating to education and childcare and the introduction of new standards;
- Setting up programmes of out of school learning activities;
- Introduction of a new training and qualifications framework for childcare workers;
- Expansion of childcare training opportunities (including opportunities delivered through the New Deal).

Making childcare more affordable by:

- The introduction of a new Childcare Tax Credit within the Working Families Tax Credit (introduced in 1999 as a replacement for Family Credit);
- Support for parents in education and training through help with the costs of childcare.
- Support with the costs of childcare for parents participating in the New Deal programmes.

Making childcare more accessible by:

- Increased investment in childcare to secure an increase in the number of childcare places- £170 million of the proposed £300 million investment to come from the Lottery;
- A free education place for all 4 year olds from September 1998;
- The development of local childcare information services to meet national standards and linked by a national helpline.

Delivery of the Strategy

- The importance of *partnership* between national and local government and the wide range of stakeholders in childcare provision is established;
- All of these proposals were to be taken forward at the local level through new Childcare Partnerships based on the Early Years Development Partnerships.
- The importance of employer involvement and family friendly employment policies is considered.

It is claimed that the success of the National Childcare Strategy will be seen in relation to two areas:

- better outcomes for children, including readiness to learn by the time they reach school and enjoyable, developmental activities out of school hours; and
- more parents with the chance to take up work, education or training because they have access to diverse, good quality childcare.

(DfEE, 1998, Paragraph ES2)

The National Childcare Strategy can, therefore, be seen as a vehicle to advance wider employment and educational agendas in the context of welfare restructuring. As Gill Scott argues, this amounts to 'an intentional shift in the work, family, state triangle on the part of the state' (1998: 522). The implications of this approach to framing childcare policy will be discussed later in the chapter.

The Inter-Departmental Childcare Review, *Delivering for children and families* (Strategy Unit, 2002) identified further plans for the transformation of childcare policy. The twin themes of alleviating child poverty through promoting employment opportunity and improving outcomes for children through early years education and childcare remained the focus for discussion. It was noted that, despite progress, problems with the availability of childcare remained, especially in deprived areas. The Review proposed further investment in childcare including the creation of new children's centres providing a range of services for children and families and the expansion of childcare in and around schools. In addition a new inter-departmental unit was proposed that would draw together responsibility for childcare, early years education and Sure Start.

The Government appears to have now widened its focus in response to criticisms that it has been preoccupied with pushing parents back into the labour market. In *Choice for Parents, the best start for children: a ten year strategy for childcare*, (HM Treasury, 2004) the Government set out how it would build on the achievements of the National Childcare Strategy and the Sure Start programme. As noted earlier, the National Childcare Strategy had identified that the development of childcare should be based on the principles of 'quality', 'affordability' and 'availability'. In the ten year strategy a fourth principle of 'choice' was added so that 'parents are better supported in the choices they make about their work and family responsibilities' (2004, Para 1.10: 4). In Section Two I will explore the issue of parental choice further.

The Childcare Act 2006 based on the ten- year strategy received Royal Assent in July and is described as:

> An Act to make provision about the powers and duties of local authorities and other bodies in England in relation to the improvement of the well-being of young children; to make provision about the powers and duties of local authorities in England and Wales in relation to the provision of childcare and the provision of information to parents and other persons; to make provision about the regulation and inspection of childcare in England; to amend Part 10A of the Children Act 1989 in relation to Wales; and for connected purposes.
>
> (Childcare Act 2006, Chapter 21)

This legislation introduces further regulation of the childcare and early years sectors. However, some sections apply only to England whilst others impact on the responsibilities of local authorities in England and Wales. The Act places a duty on both English and Welsh local authorities 'to secure sufficient childcare for working parents' (Childcare Act 2006, Chapter 21, Para 6 for England, Para 22 for Wales). In this way the framing of childcare as a service only for those seeking work or engaged in education or training that will provide a route into work is embedded in the legislation. Childcare policy in Wales, however, has been developed by the Welsh Assembly Government and will be considered further in Chapter Four.

(b) Supporting Families?

The National Childcare Strategy was presented as one part of a package of Government support for families (Rahilly and Johnston, 2002). In November 1998 the Government published a Green Paper *Supporting Families* (Home Office, 1998) based on the deliberations of the Ministerial Group on the Family chaired by the Home Secretary. The Green Paper claimed that the Government's intention was to

introduce measures that would support families and thus strengthen family life. The 'family policy' outlined in the Green Paper focused on five areas linked with specific proposals that it claimed would help families. These are summarised in Box 5:

BOX 5: A SUMMARY OF THE MEASURES PROPOSED BY THE MINISTERIAL GROUP ON THE FAMILY (HOME OFFICE, 1998)

AREA OF POLICY [xv]	INITIATIVES[xvi]
1.Better Services and Support for Parents	◆ *The establishment of a new National Family and Parenting Institute.* ◆ *Provision of a new national parenting helpline.* ◆ *An enhanced role for health visitors.* ◆ *The Sure Start Programme.*
2. Better Financial Support for Families.	◆ *Increase in Child Benefit.* ◆ *Working Families Tax Credit to include a childcare tax credit.* ◆ *New Deal for Lone Parents.* ◆ *Pilot Education Maintenance Allowance Scheme.* ◆ *Reform of child support.*
3.Helping Families Balance Work and Home.	◆ *National Childcare Strategy and National Carers' Strategy.* ◆ *Working Families Tax Credit.* ◆ *Establishing family-friendly employment rights with regard to working hours, parental leave and dealing with family crises* ◆ *Encouraging family-friendly employment practice.*
4.Strengthening Marriage.	◆ *Initiatives to strengthen the institution of marriage e.g. a guide to rights and responsibilities in marriage, marriage preparation schemes, expand role of registrars.* ◆ *Strengthen services to support adult relationships especially at times of potential crisis such as birth of a child.*
5. Better Support for Serious Family Problems. (*sic*)	◆ *Support where there are problems with children's learning. E.g truancy.* ◆ *Support parents whose children are offending.* ◆ *Initiatives to reduce teenage pregnancy.* ◆ *Initiatives to tackle domestic violence.*

A comparison of the initiatives identified in this Family Policy with those referred to in the National Childcare Strategy can identify areas where the agendas intersect but also areas of potential tension. Many analysts of social policy have commented on

the apparent conflicts and ambiguities in the New Labour project and in Third Way politics (Lister, 2001; McRobbie, 2000). Those ambiguities were evident within this Green Paper. The issue of how welfare state intervention operates to *support* parental needs in ways that *regulate* the moral decisions of parents (Rodger, 1995) is raised here. Martin Durham (2001) has argued that the ambiguities that were evident in this Green Paper reflect divisions within the Government with regard to the principles that should underpin family policy. In my view, the Green Paper favours traditional perspectives regarding family structure and roles that seem to be at odds with other policies associated with the New Labour project. At various points in the Green Paper it is stated that the Government does not intend to interfere in family life or to favour a particular kind of family structure. There is some recognition that there are diverse family forms. However, this is undermined by the devotion of an entire chapter to proposals to strengthen marriage; this reveals the 'normalising' tendency that drives New Labour's family policy. There is also a presumption that all parents are heterosexual. Indeed, responses to the Green Paper included criticism from organisations such as Gingerbread and Stonewall that Government appeared to be favouring a particular kind of family (Durham, 2001). A strong moralising discourse that focuses on the need to change certain aspects of parenting *behaviour* can also be discerned and this is especially obvious in the chapter concerning support for serious family problems (*sic*):

> Many lone parents and unmarried couples raise their children every bit as successfully as married parents. But marriage is still the surest foundation for raising children and remains the choice of the majority of people in Britain. (Home Office, 1998: 3)

> This Government believes that marriage provides a strong foundation for stable relationships. This does not mean trying to make people marry, or criticising or penalising people who choose not to. We do not believe that Government should interfere in people's lives in that way. *But we do share the belief of the majority of people that marriage provides the most reliable framework for raising children.*
> (Home Office, 1998: 19, my emphasis)

Moreover, it is claimed that many social 'problems' such as truancy, youth offending and teenage pregnancies are due to family pathology:

> Children who grow up in stable, successful families are less likely to become involved in offending. Helping parents to exercise effective care and supervision of their young children can achieve long-term benefits by reducing the risk that children will become involved in delinquent or offending behaviour. (Home Office, 1998: 26-27)

Proposals that aim to change parental *behaviour* through education and advice or through particular sanctions are evidently preferred over more fundamental structural changes that address problems parents may face (Rake, 2001). Support for parents is thus directed towards those who are perceived as failing in their duties. Simon Duncan observes that this conception of a 'parenting deficit' (2002: 306) takes place in a policy context 'of seeing paid work as a moral duty while demoting unpaid caring work' (2002: 306). Yet at the same time this shift towards the greater regulation of parenting practices (Edwards and Gillies, 2004) is tied in with a reassertion of the moral responsibilities of parents towards their children. This represents a tension in policy that will be examined in further detail in Section Two.

(c) Gender Equality, Work-Life Balance and Family Friendly Policies

The Green Paper *Supporting Families* (Home Office, 1998) included a chapter on the Government's intention to help families balance their work and home responsibilities. In 2000 the Government launched the Work-Life Balance campaign and this seeks to encourage employers to recognise the benefits of flexible working. Alongside this have been various developments with regard to parents' employment rights. According to Simon Duncan, New Labour policy discourse on 'the reconciliation of work and family life' (2002: 305) represents a broadening of understanding of gender equality policy focused previously in promoting equality of opportunity in paid employment. However, this is mainly as a consequence of European Union (EU) policy directives that have posed a dilemma for New Labour because:

> ....while the British government may be ideologically more attracted to the liberal US model of 'flexible' labour, it is bound by EU law to implement a more corporatist gender equality model. (Duncan, 2002: 305)

The attention to work life balance matters and parental rights in the context of EU policy directives has led to some (limited) improvements in (some) parents' rights in relation to employment. [xvii] In December 2000 the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) published the Green Paper, *Work and Parents: Competitiveness and Choice* (DTI, 2000) and this outlined proposals concerning provision to help parents balance work and home responsibilities. In March 2001 the Government subsequently announced increases in Statutory Maternity Pay, an extension of the period for which maternity leave would be paid, new rights to paid paternity leave for fathers, paid

adoption leave and an increase in the Sure Start Maternity Grant. Consultation on parental leave also took place during 2001 leading to changes in the regulations in January 2002. A Work and Parents Taskforce was set up in June 2001 and this focused on issues relating to flexible working. New employment rights were introduced from April 2003 for employees with young children to request to work flexibly. This was part of a wider package of measures relating to maternity and paternity rights and the introduction of the new child tax credits (HM Treasury and DTI, 2003). These changes have been widely criticised for not going far enough and for offering little more than minimal compliance with EU policy directives (Dean, 2002; Dean and Shah, 2002; Lister, 2002). Ruth Lister has argued that the Green Paper (DTI, 2000) was 'written with one eye on what business will accept, making clear, in particular, the Government's reluctance to introduce payment for parental leave' (2002: 523). In this sense the needs of business take priority over the needs of parents.

The debates about Work Life Balance continue following the DTI consultation *Work and Families: Choice and Flexibility* (DTI, 2005) and proposals that were set out in the Ten Year Childcare Strategy (HM Treasury, 2004). The Work and Families Act 2006 received Royal Assent in June and extended the period for maternity pay and adoption pay, extended the right to request flexible working to carers of adults, and improved rights to paternity leave.

(d) Welfare Reform, Childhood Poverty and Social Exclusion

The New Labour Government has placed a particular emphasis on policy to tackle the problem of childhood poverty (Piachaud and Sutherland, 2001). Policies relating to families, parental support and to childcare are driven particularly by the concern of the Government to pursue a 'Welfare to Work' agenda (Rake, 2001). This agenda is advanced through a wide variety of initiatives to tackle social exclusion and childhood poverty (DSS, 1998, Cabinet Office, Social Exclusion Unit, 2001; Labour Party, 1997). The Government set out its intentions to change the emphasis of social security policy in a Green Paper, *A New Contract for Welfare* in which it declared that it would 'rebuild the welfare state around work' (DSS, 1998: 23). The main emphasis of policy is to encourage welfare benefits claimants to move into employment and this is based on the Government's philosophy that this is the most effective way of tackling poverty and the problem of social exclusion. A variety of New Deal welfare to work programmes have been implemented for 18-24 year olds, for the long term unemployed, and for lone parents and disabled people who are in receipt of welfare benefits. Measures to 'make work pay' (Gray, 2001) include the introduction of a national minimum wage and the Working Families Tax Credit and support for the costs of childcare through the Childcare Tax Credit (Rahilly and Johnston, 2002).

(d) Sure Start

In addition to the targeting of parents on low incomes through welfare to work, are those funding streams that target support towards specific areas of poverty and deprivation, including support for parenting and for childcare. The Sure Start Programme (Glass, 1999; Tunstill *et al*, 2005) is of particular significance here. This was introduced in 1999 following a review of early years provision and its aim is to improve the life chances of children living in deprived communities (Gustafsson and Driver, 2005). It is directed specifically towards children aged from birth to four years of age and their families and seeks to provide better access to 'early education and play, family support and advice on nurturing, and health services specifically aimed at children' (Bagley *et al*, 2004: 598). It is a programme that encourages multi-agency collaboration through Sure Start partnerships and an encouragement of local involvement in programme delivery (Gustafsson and Driver, 2005). The programme rests on the view that early intervention when children are young can help to break cycles of disadvantage (NESS Research Team, 2004).

(f) ***Placing Children at the Heart of Social Policy***

New Labour social policy has claimed to place children's needs and interests at the heart of its concerns; to make the child one of 'the central subjects' (F.Williams, 2004a: 406). This trend towards according children particular attention has been analysed as part of the emergence of a 'social investment state' (Dobrowolsky, 2002; Lister, 2003) whereby children are constructed as future 'citizen-workers' within liberal welfare states. Hence, the centre staging of children within social policy is not

confined to the UK (Dobrowolsky and Jenson, 2004). Moreover, the claims to be child-centred are linked intimately with economic agendas:

> One of the dominant characteristics of the social investment state is the investment in the child as citizen-worker-of-the-future, achieved through anti-poverty and education measures in which a notion of partnership of the state with parents, business and the voluntary sector, is central. The overall aim is to maintain competitiveness in the global economy. (F.Williams, 2004a: 408)

Ruth Lister observes that child-focused policies may serve to sideline gender issues for 'a focus on the child is one way of side-stepping social divisions' (Lister, 2003: 436). It is in this sense that the commitment to framing policy in relation to a programme for children can be seen to use children's needs as a potent condensation symbol (Edelman, 1964) securing support from a wide range of stakeholders.

Specific policy measures that focus on children and young people are wide-ranging. Some relate to the UK as a whole whilst others have followed different routes in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Policy measures relating to Wales are discussed in detail in Chapter Four. At the UK level there is a Children and Young People's Unit and a Cabinet Committee on Children and Young People's Services, thus seeking to ensure that policies and services for children and young people are co-ordinated. The Children and Young People's Unit is responsible for supporting the work of Government across Departments in tackling child poverty and youth disadvantage. In 2003 Margaret Hodge was appointed as the first Minister of State for Children with responsibility for the range of children's services, family policy, childcare and early years provision. The Green Paper *Every Child Matters* (DfES, 2003) called 'for the biggest shake up of statutory children's services since the Seebohm Report of the 1960s' (F.Williams, 2004a: 406). This Green Paper

included proposals that would ensure services would focus around the needs of children and young people and would be more effective in safeguarding their interests. The *Every Child Matters: Change for Children* is now an ongoing programme of action designed to transform children's services and the Children Act 2004 provides the legal framework that underpins this programme. Whilst the *Every Child Matters* Green Paper contained proposals mainly for England [xviii], the Children Act 2004 has implications for both England and Wales. The Act introduced similar provisions for England and Wales although specific measures were detailed separately because of differences between children's services in each country. The overall goals of improving the well being of children and young people, and securing partnership and integration in children's services, are common to England and Wales. Legislation to create an office of children's commissioner for England was also contained within the Children Act 2004. However, Wales had already provided a lead in this regard by the appointment of the first of the UK's four children's commissioners in 2001. There are important differences in the role and remit of the Commissioners for Wales, Northern Ireland, Scotland and England (J.Williams, 2005). Interest in securing the participation of children and young people in policy processes has occurred at different levels of government across the UK (Tisdall and Davis, 2004).

Cutting across all these policy agendas is a set of assumptions that child poverty and social disadvantage can best be tackled through combining economic and educational goals. Opportunities for people to access paid work or training and for their children to benefit from early years services are fundamental to the Government's social inclusion and social justice agenda (Levitas, 1998; Cabinet Office, Social Exclusion

Unit, 2001) and are thus linked into childcare policy and funding streams. At the same time the National Childcare Strategy embraces other priorities including those relating to Work-Life Balance and the promotion of Equality and Gender Mainstreaming. In Section Two I move to a critique of New Labour policies for mothers, fathers and children in relation to issues of gender, family diversity and respecting an 'ethics of care' for all.

SECTION TWO: POLICY CRITIQUE AND DISCUSSION: WHOSE BENEFIT?

I now intend to assess New Labour childcare and family policy using the concepts of 'framing' (Benford and Snow, 2000), the 'discursive opportunity structure' (Ferree, 2003) and the deployment of 'condensation symbols' (Edelman, 1964). Childcare policy constructs the needs of parents in specific ways. This provides opportunities for certain parental needs to be met whilst closing off opportunities for the meeting of other needs. An assessment of 'who is benefiting and who not from existing care policies' (F.Williams, 2001: 487) is, therefore, highly complex. Following Catherine Marshall's (1997; 2000) model of feminist critical policy analysis, the core question that inspires me is: to ask how is policy affected by gender roles and how are gender roles shaped by policy (Marshall, 1997:2)?

Childcare and family policy draws together a variety of different agendas meaning that it is possible to find a range of master narratives or frames within the policy texts. This complexity is partly an outcome of historic factors relating to policies for young children. Helen Penn (2000) argues that there have been three main areas of

policy and provision for young children, nursery education, childcare for working parents and welfare care for children in need. Whilst all three areas have been re-examined under New Labour policy reform, these services cater for different, yet overlapping, needs and are based on different practices, philosophies and modes of regulation. In addition New Labour reforms of each area have been led by different government departments, albeit with the intention of achieving integration of services for children (Penn, 2000).

It is possible to identify at least *four* different agendas that may frame how childcare is thought about in New Labour policy texts:

The ***economic*** frame constructs childcare mainly as a service for parents in paid work and as a mechanism for stimulating economic growth and encouraging people into the labour market. The frame links with the 'welfare to work' agenda (Lewis, 2002) thus connecting it to concerns over poverty and social exclusion. By framing the role of childcare in this way the possibilities for offering *universal* childcare for all parents and children that want it is closed off. Simultaneously, the focus on paid work as the route to tackling poverty closes off choices for parents, especially those on low incomes, who would like to care for their children at home. Arguably, it is this frame that is paramount in policy texts and the other frames identified here all intersect with economic priorities. The neglect of the value of unpaid caring work in policy undermines claims made within the other frames. In addition the focus on *social exclusion* frames problems of poverty, wealth and economic inequalities in specific ways.

The concept of social exclusion is central to New Labour discourse around welfare reform (Bagley *et al*, 2004; Power and Gewirtz, 2001). However, its meaning is open to competing interpretations, it is a 'condensation symbol' (Edelman, 1964) linked to the economic framing of policy that is hotly contested. It is helpful to read policy in relation to the three interpretations of social exclusion identified by Ruth Levitas (1998):

(a) *redistributive egalitarian discourse* based on a commitment to tackle poverty through addressing inequalities and associated with traditional socialist values;

(b) *moral underclass discourse* based on a moralistic view that the socially excluded are responsible for their position, they are to be blamed for their dependency on the state and it is their behaviour and attitudes that need to be addressed and

(c) *social integrationist discourse*. Here participation in paid work is identified as the main way that social exclusion can be addressed.

According to Levitas (1998) New Labour policy is mainly based on social integrationist discourse but at times discourse relating to the moral underclass is also evident. The dominant discourse used in relation to childcare policy is the social integrationist discourse although there are also shades of the moral underclass discourse underpinning the efforts to ensure that the children of the socially excluded are exposed to positive experiences in early years services as soon as possible. Here, there is a view of social exclusion as a disease that can be prevented if professionals catch it early enough.

Ruth Lister is wary of the shift 'from equality to social inclusion' (1998: 215) in welfare policies. She comments:

> ..while we have a government committed to promoting *social inclusion*, it appears to have abandoned the goal of promoting greater *equality*. The question has to be whether, in the context of entrenched structural inequalities, genuine social inclusion, including the eradication of poverty, is possible without greater equality. (1998: 224)

What is missing from the New Labour economic agenda is a commitment to tackling poverty through *redistribution* of wealth and material resources, the first model suggested by Levitas (1998). This has profound implications for the way in which New Labour can then meet some of the claims made in the context of the other frames identified here. Linking this to Fraser's (1997) understanding of 'redistribution' of resources, it must be remembered that structural inequalities are not only social class based but also relate to other dimensions including gender and ethnicity. In New Labour's vision of engagement in paid work as the key route to citizenship, neither recognition claims nor redistribution claims can be adequately met.

The ***children's needs/ rights*** frame focuses on meeting the interests of children. As Helen Penn and Vicky Randall observe:

> ...the child and child poverty constitute a positive, acceptable symbol for the government's overall social policy, as well as a rallying point for different strands within the Left. (2005: 83)

Whilst this discourse may include claims to concern for the well being and rights of all children, it is often directed towards children deemed to be vulnerable or at risk because of family poverty or perceived failure in parenting. It may be linked to a

commitment to early years education and encouraging healthy child development based on the belief that early intervention will help address a wide variety of social problems later. The principles underpinning Sure Start and other area- based anti-poverty and community regeneration programmes share this view (Glass, 1999). The belief that it is necessary for social policy to break the 'cycle of deprivation' through tackling childhood poverty drives these programmes (Deacon, 2003). However, it is pertinent to ask how an agenda that is so cautious about the redistribution of wealth and places so much emphasis on paid work as the antidote to social problems can claim a universal commitment to children.

The ***'work-life' balance/ gender equality*** frame (Duncan, 2002;Glover, 2002) expresses an interest in enabling both mothers and fathers to undertake paid work and participate in care and leisure activities. Where gender equality is referred to in policy texts, it is generally confined to issues of work-life balance and to promoting equality in paid work opportunities.

The ***supporting parents*** frame focuses on the role of government in providing assistance to and working in partnership with parents. In common with the other frames, this may embrace diverse discourses and policy agendas (Rake, 2001) and address different 'recipients' of policy initiatives. It may address the need to encourage *parent participation* in policy delivery, such as in local Sure Start programmes (Gustafsson and Driver, 2005). Alternatively it may relate to the expansion of the *parenting education* 'industry' (Miller and Sambell, 2003) embracing a view that (certain) parents may benefit from professional expertise if they are to discharge their role effectively. The childcare policy agenda includes both

concerns whilst also espousing a rhetoric of *parental choice* in regard to work-life balance and decisions over the kind of (formal/ informal) childcare to be utilised. Alongside claims to provide various sources of support for parents, there is a strong emphasis on parental responsibilities couched in a moralising rhetoric (Rake, 2001).

In addition to these four ways of framing policy it is possible to discern rhetoric about 'choice' in the claims made by policy. It has been noted that 'choice' is now a key value driving welfare state reform (Lewis and Giullari, 2005) yet claims for choice are inherently problematic. I agree with Susan Himmelweit and Maria Sigala that "'choice' is not a straightforward term to apply in this area' (2004: 457) because decisions made about the distribution of paid work and care operate within deep cultural and structural constraints. My interviews with mothers and fathers sought to illuminate this claim.

As these discursive frames have become part of the 'social texture' they have directed the ways in which policy-makers, professionals and parents may conceive the relationship between childcare, gender equality and social justice. In later chapters I will illustrate this claim with reference to the research evidence. Here I intend to identify some of the academic and political debates about New Labour social policy and some of the current research into its impact on families. There are two main questions that I will pursue:

(a) What is the significance of gender equity issues in New Labour family and childcare policy? What are the implications for mothering and fathering

practices? Does policy respond to claims for 'recognition' or 'redistribution' in gendered caring practices?

(b) Will policy provide genuine support and choice to parents, thus enhancing the well being of mothers, fathers and children in different circumstances?

I shall argue that New Labour policy shows weaknesses in both areas. These weaknesses are all rooted in the framing of policies concerning care, support and well being in relation to an economic agenda that celebrates 'paid work as the key route to citizenship' (Rake, 2001: 209) and as part of the shift from 'passive' to 'active' welfare (Lewis and Giullari, 2005). In turn this links to issues raised in Chapter One regarding the changing nature of welfare state regimes and definitions of citizenship.

(a) ***Gender equity, parenting and care: 'recognition' or 'redistribution'?***

> Women increasingly want to work and have careers as well as being mothers. Many fathers want more involvement with their children's upbringing. (Home Office, 1998: 2)

> The Government welcomes women's greater involvement and equality in the workplace and wants to ensure that all those women who wish to can take up these opportunities. (DfEE, 1998: Para 1.6)

New Labour makes claims about changing gender roles within families and support for gender equality as one justification for the introduction of family and childcare initiatives. Nevertheless, childcare and family policy texts reflect ambivalence over

issues of gender. As Jane Lewis and Susanna Giullari have observed, where policy refers to gender equality it is 'often defined in a particular, partial and instrumental way' (2005: 78). Gender equality is largely defined in relation to paid work opportunities thus evading its connection to the distribution of labour in the home and in relation to who cares. Policy texts refer to the generic needs of parents and, therefore, employ a gender- neutral discourse but this 'effectively disguises the continuing gender divisions of caring labour' (Rake, 2001: 223).

The National Childcare Strategy (DfEE, 1998) and succeeding childcare policy texts refer to the trend towards mothers returning to paid employment and evidence that more would do so if childcare were not a barrier. Issues of work- life balance for both mothers and fathers are also mentioned. Hence gender equality is linked with childcare as a labour market and work- life balance issue. Childcare is presented as opening up opportunities for women, resonating with a liberal feminist agenda. It is claimed that childcare 'plays a key role in extending choice for women by enhancing their ability to compete in the labour market on more equal terms, helping them to overcome the glass ceiling' (Strategy Unit, 2002: 5). One of the contributors to this Inter-Departmental Childcare Review, the Women and Equality Unit, is responsible for the overall co-ordination of policy on matters of gender equality. The Cabinet has also appointed a Minister for Women and there is a Cabinet Committee on Equality. The Women and Equality Unit places an emphasis on employment related issues and support for work-life balance initiatives [xix]. The focus is on matters related to 'redistribution' claims within the public realm, enabling women to compete more easily with men so that there is a fairer distribution of resources. Issues relating to the cultural recognition of women's role in doing unpaid caring labour, the value of this

unpaid care for society, and the need for a redistribution of this labour between women and men, are thus sidelined. In this sense there is evidence of a liberal feminist agenda at work which is compatible with the liberal democratic state and leaves the gender order intact. The tension between claims for 'redistribution' and for 'recognition' (Fraser, 2001) is exemplified. The focus of policy is on a narrow understanding of 'redistribution' in terms of access to resources in the public realm, with men and women having equal shares. A wider interpretation of 'redistribution' would address the need to redistribute care work and to recognise its contribution to society through providing appropriate resources. As Fiona Williams argues:

> Although care may involve us all, it does so unequally. The care ethic argues against the gender imbalance in caring and for care as a valid activity for men and women, which requires time, financial and practical support and the recognition of choices (rather than rules, regulations and curfews). (2002: 510)

As I argued in the Introduction to this thesis, attention to care as a form of labour, thus highlights the difficulty of maintaining a distinction between 'redistribution' and 'recognition'. Current policy is confined in ways that undermine claims to promote gender equality or to offer genuine choices to mothers and fathers. Indeed, the concept of 'work-life balance' implies that all our daily activities, including care, are understood within the context of paid work opportunities and conditions. It is a concept that arguably closes off the prospects for treating unpaid caring labour as an area of legitimate attention in its own right.

This failure to fully engage with the relationship between gender and unpaid care or to value those who do the care is widely recognised in feminist critiques of New Labour social policy (Rake, 2001). Policy has shifted from favouring the male

breadwinner family towards an adult wage-earner model family (Land, 2004; Lewis, 2003; Lewis and Giullari, 2005). However, it is argued that what 'is missing from the debate is a discussion of the principles on which a move towards the adult worker model should be based, especially in regard to care work' (Lewis and Giullari, 2005: 78). Yet this discussion is imperative, for implicit within this shift is a change in ideologies of 'political motherhood'; a shift away from assuming 'mother-care' is best for children (Lewis, 2003). Research suggests that the adult worker model family may be in tension with the wishes of many mothers to give priority to the care of their children. Yet mothers make decisions about engagement in paid work in relation to 'gendered moral rationalities' concerning the balance between work and care (Duncan and Edwards, 1999). In this sense the success of the National Childcare Strategy in redefining 'political motherhood' (Windebank, 1999) or restructuring the 'gender order' (Pfau-Effinger, 1998) may be limited in the face of the prevailing norms and values that make up the 'gender culture' in particular communities. In addition there are other discourses within New Labour family policy encouraging an intensification of the parenting role that resonate with the ideology of 'sensitive/ intensive' mothering and which mothers and fathers may interpret in relation to their 'gendered moral rationalities'. It is mothers, in particular, who are likely to assume responsibility for supporting the education of their children and interpreting expert guidance on the parenting role. Given that parenting discourses place emphasis on giving time to children, they may conflict with any trends towards the adult worker model family. There does seem to be a pronounced tension between employment policies and parenting/education/family policies in this regard that is obscured in rhetoric celebrating work-life balance as a policy goal. In reality the pressure to 'work more' and to 'parent well' will continue to place mothers under considerable

stress. The National Childcare Strategy seeks to reconcile these different policy goals by making it possible for more parents to make use of formal childcare. However, the three forms of work involved in childcare, practical care, educational development and emotional support (Reay, 2005) continue for parents beyond the timetables of formal childcare provision. Indeed, the use of formal childcare can lead to the further intensification of these three forms of work for parents. In my own experience, for example, I have found that use of formal childcare can increase repeated exposure to childhood illnesses leading to further practical caring labour at home. A further example of the potential for the work of parenting to increase with the use of formal childcare can be provided with regard to parents' role in educational development. Parents are now expected to take an increasingly active part in their child's learning, in monitoring homework and in maintaining relationships with their child's school. Formal childcare providers do not replace the parental role here and, where childcare is offered within an educational setting, may even add to the burden by requesting that children complete work at home with their parents. On the other hand, my research revealed that some After-School Clubs in Swansea have a policy of *not* expecting children to do their homework on site because they wish to maintain an identity that is distinct from the school and for children to enjoy themselves. As one of the mothers that I interviewed complained, this put her under considerable pressure in the evening when she arrived home with tired children, tea still to cook and homework to be completed.

Any progress towards gender equality will need to address the redistribution of unpaid care within the home between women and men (Lewis and Giullari, 2005). Despite the trend towards increasing employment levels for women and the

extension of work-life balance initiatives, it appears that this has not resulted in a more equal distribution of unpaid caring work (Speakman and Marchington, 1999). Oriel Sullivan's (2000) research into changes in the division of labour points to some increase in men's participation in child care [xx] over the last twenty years. However, her data also shows that all women across employment status and socio-economic class categories still report significantly more time in child care than men. In this sense there is a danger that Family Friendly initiatives are only utilised by women to ease the burden of combining paid work and care rather than to encourage more men to play a caring role. As Tess Kay (2002) suggests, there may be a tendency to 'feminise the problem' of childcare as an issue for women to resolve. In their study of parental choice of child care for preschool children, for example, Carol Vincent and her colleagues (Vincent *et al*, 2004b) focused on a sample of professional middle-class mothers, all educated to at least degree level. They found that whilst the women had made a variety of decisions concerning paid work, traditional gender roles in relation to care of the children persisted, with no evidence of a trend towards greater sharing of this labour. They found it difficult to locate (middle class) fathers who played a major role in childcare, a problem that I also encountered during my research.

Jane Lewis and Susanna Giullari (2005) argue that the promotion of the adult worker model family in policy rests on the assumption that care will thus be provided through the defamilialization and commodification of caring labour. The emphasis of policy, therefore, is on how this is to be achieved rather than through addressing the issue of a redistribution of care between women and men at home. Their claims are certainly supported in an analysis of New Labour childcare policy where the goal is

to expand and improve the quality of formally provided childcare, signifying a trend towards defamilialization and commodification. However, this cannot fully resolve the childcare stresses faced by families or ease the burden on women because of the nature of the parenting role. Lewis and Giullari argue:

> If care is commodified and put in the formal arena either through the provision of cash subsidies to purchase care on the market or by directly providing public child and elderly care services, the scope for de-familialization is clearly widened. Yet we shall argue that such a strategy nevertheless results in incomplete de-familialization, because it is not possible *fully* to commodify care. (2005: 83)

Formal childcare services in the UK are a long way from full commodification and defamilialization. Indeed, it is hard to imagine how this could be achieved without shifting the roles and responsibilities of parents beyond all recognition. I believe that childcare should be distinguished from elderly care services in assessing the claims made by Lewis and Giullari (2005). Whilst I disagree with Lewis and Giullari (2005) in that full commodification and defamilialization may be (and sometimes is) achieved in elderly care services, I agree that this is not possible in relation to routine childcare. Although some children may be placed in residential homes, for example, because of severe disability or because their parents are unable to care for them for other reasons, this is unusual. Even in these circumstances regular parental contact and involvement will be encouraged by social services. Hence, childcare must be treated as a distinctive case in considering the prospects for defamilialization and commodification. Formal provision of full-time childcare is usually understood as providing cover for parents working full-time, not as providing 24- hour care throughout the year so that parents are freed from their role. Even those children that are educated in boarding schools or who are cared for by live-in nannies do not experience a fully commodified and defamilialised childhood.

Moreover, because care has an affective dimension and because access to and use of caring services still needs to be *organised*, individual carers will still face demands on their time. Whilst formal childcare may provide support for children's emotional well being, this does not replace the parent's responsibility in this regard. There is also evidence to suggest that, with regard to searching for and making arrangements to use formal childcare provision, for example, it is mainly mothers who undertake this role (Vincent *et al*, 2004b), and my study lends further support to this. It is certainly the case that, with regard to childcare, commodification has not extended so far as to fully replace the parenting role, embracing practical care, educational development and emotional support (Reay, 2005). There are many gaps left by formal childcare services and Lewis and Giullari (2005) provide the example of the role of informal care in filling the gaps that remain when formal care arrangements break down or for periods when it is unavailable to support the claim that:

> Thus the commodification of care work in the formal arena neither fully substitutes for women's caring work nor does away with their need to rely on the informal care provided by relatives and friends. (2005: 85)

The gaps left by incomplete commodification of childcare will be explored further in Chapters Six and Seven in relation to the parents' accounts of the use of formal and informal childcare services. Research by Jane Wheelock and Katharine Jones (2002) demonstrates the significance of informal childcare in enabling parents to work. Their survey of working parents showed that many were making considerable use of informal support either instead of or in addition to formal care. Their evidence revealed that the flexibility required of working parents means they must rely on informal care- many shift patterns, for example, could not be accommodated by formal provision and child sickness can also pose problems. Wheelock and Jones

(2002) suggest that these problems could be eased by more family friendly employment policies but their research revealed little evidence that these were in place. These gaps could also be addressed by the extension of formal childcare to cover all shift patterns and child illness. However, this may not be viewed as desirable in the context of a moral economy of care in which many parents (including myself) question whether too much formal childcare is in the interests of children.

It is, therefore, important not to conflate the encouragement of increased labour market involvement of mothers with progress towards gender equality, improved work-life balance or an extension of choice for women or men. New Labour social policy is based on a 'work first' strategy (Lewis and Giullari, 2005: 82) which undermines claims about its link to gender equality or to expanding genuine choices for women and men. In addition to continuing inequalities between women and men in paid work and care, the relationship between childcare policy and gender equality is further complicated in terms of differences in social class, ethnic origin and geographical location. Evidence suggests, for example, that childcare and family friendly policies have a differential impact on high and low paid workers, leading Gill Scott to conclude:

> There is a growing polarization between the educated mother employed in the service-sector who can maintain her labour market position, and the less educated woman whose life becomes increasingly dominated by patterns of domesticity and part-time low paid work after becoming a mother. (1998: 526)

Although one goal of the National Childcare Strategy and related policies is to encourage mothers in low-income households to access paid work and to increase their working hours (Lewis, 2003), this does not mean this polarisation is starting to

break down. Those mothers on low incomes may face particular problems in benefiting from the National Childcare Strategy (Lewis, 2003; Rake, 2001) calling into question claims that it can provide a route to gender equality or a way out of poverty. The Childcare Tax Credit, for example, only covers 70 per cent of the costs of childcare for those eligible, but paying the balance may be prohibitive for those on the lowest incomes. Those families with three children or more are especially disadvantaged in that Childcare Tax Credit is only paid for the first and second child. In addition women in low paid employment are those most likely to rely on informal childcare which is not deemed to be eligible under tax credit regulations. Both Working Tax Credit and Childcare Tax Credit encourage parents to work longer by only paying those who work at least 16 hours per week. This is a real penalty where parents, often mothers in low paid, part-time work, either cannot access longer hours or do not wish to do so because of their caring role. Whilst the ten year strategy for childcare (HM Treasury, 2004) claimed to offer increased choice to parents, the choice to stay at home with young children or to reduce working hours for a period will continue to depend on family income. Those mothers in low income households that have been one target of policy will obviously have a restricted 'choice' in the absence of benefits for those engaged in care at home. Moreover, mothers in low-income households who move into paid work are likely to remain in 'low-skilled, part-time work without prospects for promotion or employer provided training' (Rake, 2001: 216).

Research reveals that those women and men in low paid, low status employment are the least likely to benefit from policies relating to work-life balance. In reviewing the impact of family friendly employment policies, for example, Tess Kay draws a

distinction between 'work-rich' and 'work-poor' families in balancing paid work and care of children:

> While highly educated workers in professional occupations may be relatively well positioned to negotiate favourable work conditions, low-skilled employees in insecure employment usually have less scope to do so. (2002: 232)

Similarly, in her review of some recent studies into family friendly employment practices Geraldine Healy concludes 'there are pockets of the economy where flexible working arrangements have made relatively few inroads' (2004: 220). Those organisations that are adopting family friendly employment policies have distinctive characteristics and tend to employ women with a high level of educational attainment (Healy, 2004). Similarly, with regard to equal opportunities policies, Kim Hoque and Mike Noon cite evidence that 'even in instances where EO policies are more than just paper exercises, they are often designed to have only a selective effect' (2004: 484). Moreover, polices are adopted only where there are clear benefits for the organisation, hardly surprising given the way New Labour has responded to EU policy directives. Family friendly employment policies fit uneasily alongside the Government's commitment to flexible labour markets and a soft approach to the regulation of business (Driver and Martell, 2002). As Gillian Pascall points out 'family- friendly policies will be offered in so far as it is profitable for companies to do so' (1999: 263).

The potential tension between supporting the needs of business and promoting the needs of families is the theme explored in Hartley Dean's research (Dean, 2002; Dean and Shah, 2002) into the experiences of low-income families. He argues that 'welfare to work' has to be assessed in relation to evidence of labour market

polarisation between 'core' and 'periphery' jobs and the demand for flexibility. In this sense welfare to work may achieve greater labour market participation but this will often be into the 'peripheral' sector for those in low paid and insecure employment, thus doing little to tackle social inequalities. This poses problems in relation to the policy goal of tackling family poverty and to offering work-life balance for those working families on low incomes. In Dean's research it was found that employers supported work-life balance policies only where there was a business case meaning 'they were more inclined to offer parental leave or childcare subsidies to valuable highly skilled workers than to expendable low-skilled workers' (Dean, 2002: 8). Dean is critical of New Labour's approach to family friendly employment measures for failing to address the problems of ensuring 'peripheral' workers can benefit from them (2002: 8). In this sense Dean's research confirms that there are tensions between New Labour's employment policies and family policies. Childcare is one arena where those tensions will be played out.

Indeed, research suggests that jobs in the 'peripheral' sector may demand the kind of 'flexibility' of workers that can make arranging childcare impossible. It may involve working unsociable and unpredictable hours and formal childcare provision is not sufficiently flexible to meet these needs. Kathryn Backett-Milburn and her colleagues (2001) explored the daily experiences of combining paid work with parenting for a sample of mothers with children of primary school age. Of these, 15 mothers were living with partners and 15 were lone parents. Many women took jobs below their abilities in order to reconcile work with the demands of childcare yet still encountered problems in balancing work and care. Few women were aware of any family-friendly policies in their workplace. On the contrary, many felt under pressure

not to take time off when children were sick and thus to risk being seen as unreliable. Participants spoke of the complexity of childcare arrangements and the fact that these would have to change around times when children were ill or out of the school term. The role of informal care in dealing with these situations was highlighted. They conclude that childcare provision needs to be responsive to the flexible working hours expected by many employers to cover evenings, early mornings and weekend work and to cover times when schools are closed. However, at the same time, employment practices need to shift to take account of parenting roles. While parents are expected to be flexible, at present neither paid work nor formal childcare provision may meet their needs.

We are clearly a long way from securing work-life balance choices for all women and men. Claims that policy will promote gender equality need to be interrogated in relation to the evidence that women and men continue to have very different labour market positions. The movement of women into the labour market has not meant they have been provided with a passport into attractive employment. As Jane Lewis and Susanna Giullari (2005) argue, women have tended to move into the more 'flexible' forms of labour and we are a long way from achieving gender equality 'in the sense of equally secure, equally well-paying jobs, to both men and women' (2005: 82). Moreover, there is a danger that existing inequalities between women within the labour market could be further enhanced as those with the resources and opportunities to take advantage of extensions to parental rights are those already in well-paid, secure employment. This serves as a reminder that any evaluation of work-life balance policy in supporting gender equality must start from an understanding of diversity and inequality in women's and men's experiences.

(b) ***Extending choice and support to parents? Enhancing the well being of mothers, fathers and children in different circumstances?***

We have seen that New Labour family and childcare policy addresses parents in a wide variety of ways through claims to provide 'choice' and 'support' in the conduct of parenting and decisions about childcare alongside claims to promote the well being of children. These claims are assessed in turn.

(i) Parental Choice

The promise of 'choice' should always rouse the suspicions of sociologists because of the socially and culturally embedded character of choice making. It is possible to indicate gaps in the alternatives being offered to parents through policy. Many of the gaps relate to those already indicated in the evaluation of the capacity of policy to encourage gender equity and to promote work life balance. Because policy does not pay attention to the role of unpaid care, because there are limits on how far childcare can be commodified and because parents employ 'gendered moral rationalities', it is unlikely to be able to deliver its promise of greater parental choice. In their research into the impact of the National Childcare Strategy in Liverpool, Simon Rahilly and Elaine Johnston found that 'most mothers (both in and out of waged work) did not feel that they had any choice as to their childcare arrangements' (2002: 493). Similarly, in her assessment of childcare policy, Jane Lewis observes that the 'complex pattern of finance and provision presents parents- usually mothers- with choices, but not always pleasant ones' (2003: 235).

Studies on parents' use of childcare, for example, have found that many parents have to rely on informal childcare from relatives and friends either entirely or to plug gaps and may have a strong preference for informal care (Rahilly and Johnston, 2002; Wheelock and Jones, 2002). The difference between parents' reflection on the value of informal care and the policy position on its role within the National Childcare Strategy provides one indication of the failure to offer genuine choices to parents. The research by Wheelock and Jones (2002) shows many prefer the use of informal care because it is perceived as the best quality, the best for their children and with people who are trusted. They conclude:

> A clear understanding of why working parents use complementary childcare is essential for any childcare policy that hopes to be attuned to what families actually want. (2002: 459)

At present it would seem that childcare policy is not fully sensitive to what parents either prefer or need in order to balance paid work with childcare. The role of informal care deserves to be taken seriously but support for childcare costs under the tax credit system will only meet the costs of approved childcare and it is explicitly stated that childcare provided by relatives will not attract support. This provides further illustration that unpaid caring labour does not attract the recognition that it deserves. Most of the relatives and friends who provide informal childcare are women (Wheelock and Jones, 2002) thus calling into question claims that childcare policy is an instrument to progress gender equality. The contribution made by those in these informal gendered networks of care is not fully recognised in New Labour policy despite political interest in social capital building (Morrow, 1999). In their research into family and kin relations in Swansea, Nickie Charles and Charlotte

Davies found that 'at both the formal and informal levels of community the work women do is crucially important to whether or not communities exist' (2005: 688). Evidence of the value women may place on informal social networks is also provided by Jane Parry (2005) in her study of a South Wales coalmining community. Nevertheless, these gendered social networks 'also imposed restrictions upon their (*working class women's*) behaviour and limited social movement' (2005: 155). My research indicates that the care of children is an important service provided by women in these social networks. Yet both the reliance on informal care and the expectations placed on some women to conduct it may also be seen as potentially restrictive. The role of informal care is an issue that has been debated by those involved in the making of childcare policy in Wales as I shall show in Chapter 4. In addition I will return to the significance of informal care in making work possible for parents in Chapters 6 and 7.

(ii) Parental support

I will consider whether New Labour parenting policy is likely to support parents and enhance the well being of mothers and fathers. There has been an expansion of services that work with parents (Miller and Sambell, 2003) and this has been described as an 'increasing professionalization of childrearing practices' (Gillies, 2005: 70). Val Gillies (2005) presents a convincing argument that New Labour's interest in supporting parents is part of a moral agenda. Whilst being presented as a universal policy of potential relevance to all families 'this policy discourse reveals a class-specific concern with disadvantaged or 'socially excluded' families' (Gillies, 2005: 71). The targeting of specific types of families in New Labour Policy is also

evident in its Teenage Pregnancy Strategy (Kidger, 2004) and the New Deal for Lone Parents (Standing, 1999). Hence, behind the rhetoric of supporting parents is a moralising discourse that assumes some parents need to be re-educated in order to parent effectively.

Increased policy intervention in the realm of parenting under New Labour can be linked to conceptions of social responsibility in Third Way thinking with a role for parents in meeting their obligations and transmitting the 'right' attitudes and values to their children (Edwards and Gillies; 2004; Gillies, 2005). Following the discussion of the ideologies of 'sensitive mothering' (Walkerdine and Lucey, 1989) and 'intensive mothering' (Hays, 1996) it will be evident that the regulation of child rearing according to white, middle class cultural norms pre-dates New Labour and extends beyond the formal boundaries of the state. Historically, modes of regulation have focused on mothers and rely on the capacity of mothers to engage in 'self-surveillance'. It can be argued that New Labour is shaping a discourse of 'intensive parenting' on the basis of international trends towards the intensification of work, education and family life and in order to ensure the conduct of parenting is harnessed to the New Labour project. Whilst 'sensitive mothers' know their place is to stay at home with their young children, 'intensive parents' presumably have the skills to balance paid work and care without neglecting their duties to raise their children to be good citizens.

There will be structural and contextual factors that influence the capability of parents to manage the intensification of their role and to meet norms that celebrate white, middle class values. Indeed, ironically this intensification is likely to be more easily

managed by those families that still conform to the male breadwinner family model. In these circumstances mothers still retain time to mediate with the agencies that dispense advice, make themselves available to listen to and play with their children and fulfil their duties in supporting their child's education. However, the fact that parenting takes place on an uneven playing field is not fully recognised so that particular groups of parents may be labelled as inadequate and their 'poor parenting' blamed for a wide range of social problems. They are thus vulnerable to intervention in the guise of 'parenting support' (Edwards and Gillies, 2004). In this context 'teenage mothers', 'lone mothers' and 'absent fathers' are all stigmatised despite the rhetoric in *Supporting Families* (Home Office, 1998) that family diversity must be recognised.

Kay Standing (1999) illustrates the tensions in New Labour's policy towards parents in relation to encouraging greater parental involvement in education. As she points out, parental involvement refers to a wide variety of practical, emotional and educational tasks that mothers perform in school and after school. Mothers will need the time to be involved meaning 'Neither lone mother, nor working mother, families fit this model of parental involvement' (Standing, 1999: 482). Mothers face a tension in that they are being encouraged to move into paid employment at the same time as expectations of their educational involvement increase further. These conflicts are not worked out in policy, but by mothers themselves facing stress in meeting too many demands on their time. This is handled in different ways and interpreted through 'gendered moral rationalities' (Duncan and Edwards, 1999). Some of the mothers in Standing's (1999) research who were in paid work asked other female family members to take on the role of parental involvement in schools, thus ensuring

their children did not lose out in this regard. This is supported in my own research, as I shall show in Chapters 6 and 7.

Standing also found that, contrary to the view that as children reach school age mothers will find their responsibilities for childcare reduce, some mothers felt their responsibilities increased. This is partly as a consequence of the impact of the school timetable on the mother's organisation of time, delivering and collecting children from school and meeting the requirements of parental involvement. This presents a challenge to the assumptions of commentators such as Ruth Lister that lone parents of older children should be obliged to seek work:

> As a member of the Commission on Social Justice, set up by the late John Smith to advise the Labour Party on welfare policy, I put my name to a recommendation that lone (and other) parents of older children on benefit should be available for at least part-time, paid work as a condition of receiving benefit, providing certain conditions were met. (2002: 527-528)

The assumption that the age of the children should be a factor determining availability for work is not explained. However, it implies a linear model of the demands of parenthood reducing with age of children. The testimonies of parents suggest this may be out of tune with their experiences.

As Gillies points out, the deployment of gender-neutral language in policy 'disguises the fact that it is predominantly mothers who maintain primary responsibility for the day-to-day care of their children, while fathering is something the majority of men are forced to fit around full-time work' (2005: 78). However, there are some significant exceptions to this gender-neutral language which suggest that fathers are mainly of interest when they are either absent or presenting certain 'problems'. In

Supporting Families, for example, the introduction of mentoring programmes is proposed as an initiative to support families and it is suggested that this could involve the provision of 'a positive male role model for boys from families where the father is absent' (Home Office, 1998: 10). However, the reasons why this may be beneficial or what kind of male role model is deemed to be 'positive' remain obscure. The concern for positive male role models is confined here to cases of father absence but there is no discussion of the roles played by fathers who are present. Another example can be found in the section devoted to tackling teenage parenthood where teenage mothers and fathers are given separate attention. It appears that gender roles are only considered in family policy in relation to perceived social problems.

There is a need to consider what the Government is doing actively to encourage men to take on a caring role. According to Richard Collier (2001) there are two areas of policy that provide examples of efforts to promote the concept of 'active fatherhood'. The first area concerns policy relating to divorce and relationship breakdown. The second area involves policy to support a 'work-life' balance. As Collier observes, the second area is interesting because generally legislation has only viewed fathering as a concern in situations of relationship breakdown and father absence. Whilst work-life balance policies do have the capacity to open up a debate about men's caring role we saw in the previous section that the minimum rights so far granted in the UK are not resulting in a significant redistribution of gendered caring labour.

Despite minimum rights for parents in employment there is an absence of strong policies to enable men to take a more active caring role. Research conducted for the Equal Opportunities Commission (Hatten *et al*, 2002) shows that fathers still see

themselves mainly in relation to a breadwinner role. Only a minority of the fathers surveyed saw themselves as having an equal role with partners in childcare and household labour. It is also noted that where both partners work it is the mothers who arrange their work to fit around family and to take time off for emergencies. Whilst these findings are unsurprising they do suggest that the recent moves towards family-friendly employment rights have done little so far to challenge traditional practices. It would seem that we need to look to some of the examples set by other European countries in terms of more vigorous attempts by the state to encourage equal parenting and to offer parents a comprehensive package of rights at work. Among other things this might involve addressing the issue of whether legislation should *compel* men to take paternal leave.

Berit Brandth and Elin Kvande (2001) have explored the responses of employed fathers to parental leave schemes in Norway including a paternity quota of four weeks that is compulsory for the father to take. Unlike other forms of leave it cannot be transferred to the mother meaning:

> The paternity quota is a 'gentle' way the welfare state uses to force fathers into taking part in early childcare. Designing the scheme in this way is a new principle as it may be considered an approach by which the state feminism system pushes fathers into active fatherhood. (Brandth and Kvande, 2001: 256)

A high proportion of fathers did make use of this entitlement in contrast to the evidence that before this was introduced only a small proportion of fathers took up opportunities for voluntary leave. The fact that employers are compelled to accept that fathers have this right makes it more possible for fathers to take leave. Here Norway provides an interesting example of what can be possible where the state

takes a positive lead in promoting equality and encouraging paternal involvement in childcare. It also reveals how a policy that is gender specific rather than gender neutral can in some contexts act as a more effective mechanism to secure gender equality.

(iii) Promoting the well being of children

So far I have considered the implications of childcare and family policy for the well being of mothers and fathers. It is now timely to ask whether claims that policy is child-centred can be justified? Will children benefit from New Labour family and childcare policy? Whilst New Labour use 'children's needs' as a potent condensation symbol, it is obvious that some children will gain more from new policy initiatives than others. In the absence of universal childcare and parenting support, children's experiences will continue to depend on the circumstances of their primary caregivers as well as where they live. In this sense children in those families subject to stigmatisation may suffer accordingly. Children with parents who are unable to participate in paid work opportunities or who are in low paid or insecure employment will continue to be vulnerable to poverty and material hardship. Children's access to early years education and childcare provision also varies according to family income and geographical location in the context of a childcare market. Helen Penn and Vicky Randall (2005) observe that, despite the National Childcare Strategy, the availability of formal childcare provision remains uneven.

It is thus difficult not to dismiss the celebration of the child in New Labour policy as a cynical, instrumental strategy. Whilst it should be acknowledged that New Labour

has used the tax and benefit system to achieve some redistribution of income to families with children this does not go far enough and rests too much on parents' capacity for work. Nevertheless, the increase in Child Benefit and the introduction of the Child Tax Credit have benefited all families with children, as these are not linked to participation in paid work. This is a small step forward but, in my view, much more needs to be done. As David Piachaud and Holly Sutherland conclude, in their assessment of New Labour's progress in reducing child poverty, 'How far child poverty can be ended and children's opportunities improved without confronting the broader inequalities in society is open to question' (2001: 115).

CONCLUSION: ISSUES FOR EXPLORATION.

This chapter has provided an introduction to New Labour's social policy agenda with regard to childcare and supporting families. I have argued that, in the justification of childcare as an issue for policy attention, claims have been made that policy will extend wellbeing for mothers, fathers and children in a variety of ways:

- The provision of choice for parents;
- The extension of support to parents;
- The promotion of gender equality and work-life balance;
- The expansion of services in the interests of all children.

However, the 'master frame' that drives New Labour childcare policy constructs it as an *economic* issue and as part of the welfare-to-work agenda (Ball and Charles, 2006). This limits the possibilities for the realisation of claims around the principles

of choice, support, equality and children's interests. These principles act as 'condensation symbols' likely to achieve broad-based political support but they are undermined by the 'master frame' driven by economic and moral priorities. These principles are unlikely to be addressed adequately in the absence of an understanding of unpaid care, the emotional obligations surrounding care and the limits to the defamilialisation and commodification (Lewis and Giullari, 2005) of childcare. The research into parents' 'childcare strategies' and efforts to balance paid work and care reviewed here reveal that neither 'recognition' nor 'redistribution' claims (Fraser, 1997) are being enhanced by the National Childcare Strategy and related agendas. As I noted earlier, there is only a limited effort to respond to a restricted definition of 'redistribution' claims in terms of equal access to paid work opportunities. Moreover, the significance of parents' 'gendered moral rationalities' (Duncan and Edwards, 1999; Duncan *et al*, 2003) serve as a reminder that policy needs to engage at a deeper level with the emotional and cultural context of care.

With regard to the significance of comparing different welfare state regimes in their treatment of issues of gender, care and paid employment it should be noted that child care has been placed on the agenda of many countries within the European union in the context of welfare restructuring. However, different countries are developing alternative approaches to resolving problems in this field (Mahon, 2002) in a context of weak EU policy on childcare (Randall, 2000). Rianne Mahon offers a typology based on three models of childcare policy:

- Childcare policy informed by 'Third Way' thinking; the route taken by both the United Kingdom and the Netherlands;
- Childcare policy linked to the principle of 'neofamilialism' and adopted in Finland and France;
- Childcare policy driven by egalitarian priorities and illustrated by responses in Denmark and Sweden.

(2002: 344)

Particular features of Third Way childcare policy, Mahon argues, include the fact that 'mothers' (short) part-time working pattern is taken as a given' (2002: 354). In the UK this is reinforced by the principles underlying the Tax Credit system and the expansion of pre-school care on a part-time basis whereby working parents have to plug the gap by working part-time, by use of informal care or a complex jigsaw of childcare provision. Moreover, it is expected that the market in response to parental demand will deliver childcare provision. This can be compared with the other two models identified by Mahon (2002). The neofamilialization model supports home based care as parents who decide to stay at home with their children get financial support. However, as Mahon points out, this conflicts with steps towards both gender and class equality. It is those mothers with lower levels of education and located in low paid work who are most likely to take up this support. The egalitarian model encourages some sharing of care and a return to the labour market for both women and men through generous policies on parental leave and public child care provision. Each of these models has different implications in relation to principles of choice and equality.

It can be argued that Third Way childcare policies focus on what is needed to support women's (partial) participation in the labour market rather than to ask why men face

barriers to their participation in caring. Strategies to encourage and enable men to share caring roles also need to be included in policy concerned to promote gender equality. However, with social policy promoting the work ethic so forcefully, it seems likely that men may feel even further compelled to embrace the full-time breadwinner role and may face crises in identity where this is not possible. In addition, the moral economy of care could mean that some women might resist the undermining of the male breadwinner role as they wish to be the primary caregiver. These are issues that are explored further in my interviews with parents.

In conclusion I argue that the linking of childcare and parenting policy so closely to the welfare to work agenda will need to be questioned if social policy is to act as a vehicle for parental choice and support, gender equality and children's wellbeing. I have argued that pressures towards work intensification and the intensification of the conduct of parenting may contribute towards increased stress and hardship for some mothers, fathers and children. Those least able to negotiate those stresses for themselves because of existing inequalities and material hardship may be subject to intervention couched in a moralising framework.

The purpose of this research is to explore how mothers and fathers in different socio-economic circumstances organise childcare on a daily basis in the context of this shifting policy landscape. In response to the question that I posed earlier regarding who benefits from policy and who loses out (F.Williams, 2001) I have started to indicate some possibilities. However, this is no substitute for exploring these questions with mothers and fathers directly. Following and extending Smith's claims that research should begin from women's experiences in order to better understand how these are 'socially organized' (1997: 393), I will be exploring the question of

benefit and loss and the principles of choice, support, equality and wellbeing in the context of my interviews. The research will add to the growing body of empirical research into parents' perspectives on childcare (Duncan *et al*, 2003; McDowell *et al*, 2005; Rahilly and Johnston, 2002; Vincent and Ball, 2001) through exploring these within the context of Wales.

The National Childcare Strategy (DfEE, 1998) is intended for implementation in England. Policy relating to the development of childcare in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland was devolved to their respective Governments with the expectation that the Secretaries of State in those countries would publish their own documents on childcare. Similarly, the Inter-Departmental Childcare Review, *Delivering for children and families* (Strategy Unit, 2002) applies to England. The ten year strategy for childcare (HM Treasury, 2004) covers both reserved areas such as the Tax Credit System and Maternity Rights and devolved areas. The Childcare Act 2006 lays out certain duties for Welsh local authorities in the provision of childcare and information to parents whilst other sections apply only to England. Hence, the evolution of childcare policy in Wales is complex and the Welsh Assembly Government has been able to prepare its own childcare agenda but within limits. In the next chapter I will explore what this means for mothers, fathers and children in Wales.

CHAPTER FOUR

DEVOLUTION, GENDER AND CHILDCARE: A DISTINCTIVE POLICY AGENDA IN WALES?

INTRODUCTION

In Chapter Three I provided an overview of New Labour's childcare, parenting and family policy with reference to the national level in the UK. This picture is complicated once we move to policy agendas in Wales following devolution and the creation of the National Assembly for Wales in 1999 [xxi]. This created a space for the making of childcare policy at regional level and with regard to the needs and preferences of parents and children in Welsh communities. Policy development in substantive areas such as childcare is also informed by overarching priorities referred to as themes and strategies by the Assembly. Policy is thus connected with the Assembly's social justice agenda and its commitment to mainstream equality of opportunity and gender equality across all policy developments (Chaney and Fevre, 2002; NAfW, 2004; C.Williams, 2001). Childcare policy has also been linked to the Assembly's agenda in extending the rights of children and young people (WAG, 2004a; 2005). In Chapter Three I argued that, although New Labour has connected childcare to gender equality/ work-life balance, children's needs, supporting parents and social inclusion agendas, it is *economic* matters that drive policy.

One of the distinctive features of this research is that it has enabled an exploration of the scope for 'doing things differently' in Wales (Drakeford, 2005) in relation to

childcare and parenting support policies and their interaction with the political values of gender equality, social justice and children's rights. This is of particular interest given that comparative research in the field of childcare, parenting and gender regimes tends to compare the UK as a whole with other European welfare states (Himmelweit and Sigala, 2004; Leon, 2005; Mahon, 2002). Yet this may not be the appropriate unit for comparative analysis in the context of devolution. Furthermore, the evidence that socio-spatial differences are significant in relation to families' childcare strategies and 'gendered moral rationalities' (Duncan and Edwards, 1999) adds support for research at the local and regional levels. The Assembly has powers to develop and implement policy in a number of key areas including education and training, health, housing, social services and local government. Central government has retained control over other areas such as employment, social security and financial and economic issues and, unlike the Scottish parliament, the Welsh Assembly has neither legislative nor revenue raising powers (Ball and Charles, 2006). Given that childcare policy connects with a range of both devolved and reserved issues, the Assembly is able to be innovative but within significant limits. The question remains as to how far Central Government's control of employment policy and taxation and benefits has encouraged New Labour's economic framing of childcare to reign supreme in Wales.

This chapter utilises feminist critical policy analysis (Marshall, 1997; 2000) and makes a case for treating Wales as a distinctive policy-making arena in relation to the debates on the gendering of welfare state regimes introduced in Chapter One. There is also a question regarding whether a particular Welsh policy agenda can shape wider social and cultural changes. If so, this should have implications for the

'institutional' (Smith, 1988) networks of power, discourses and local social relations relevant to the everyday lives of families in Wales. Devolution and the creation of the Assembly brought into being a new stakeholder in gender politics providing potential for a reshaping of the gender order (Connell, 1990). The gender order of the Assembly as a state institution is potentially distinct from that of the UK Government although contained by it in many ways. The picture is further complicated in that responsibility for the delivery of childcare policy lies with local Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships (EYDCPs) (Tanner *et al*, 2006) meaning there is scope for variation across local authority areas in Wales.

This chapter thus explores childcare and parenting policy in Wales in relation to the commitment to gender equality, social justice, and children's rights claimed by the Assembly. Through critical analysis of public policy texts the chapter examines the connections between childcare and these wider themes and values. Once again I utilise the concepts of 'framing', the 'discursive opportunity structure' and 'condensation symbols' to guide my policy analysis. What is significant is that devolution may have provided a space for alternative discursive frames to achieve hegemony in Wales. The chapter thus seeks to build on the review of New Labour policy in Chapter Three by analysing the discursive framing of policy in public texts in Wales and explaining the delivery mechanisms and funding streams. This will provide the basis for a consideration of the degree to which devolution is enabling the makers of childcare policy to pursue an agenda that is distinctive and shaped towards the needs of parents and children in Wales. The chapter will offer a framework against which it will be possible to assess the perspectives and

experiences of regional and local policy actors in Chapter Five and parents in Chapters Six and Seven.

The chapter is divided into two sections. In Section One I discuss three overarching priorities claimed by the Assembly to drive policy across a range of substantive areas including childcare. These are to promote equality, including gender equality, to address issues of social justice and inclusion and to respect the rights of children and young people. In Edelman's (1964) terms, these are 'condensation symbols' with which the Assembly might claim distinctiveness. They are key components within the 'discursive opportunity structure' (Ferree, 2003) that guides debates at the regional level. In Section Two I trace the making of childcare policy in Wales and place it within the context of these guiding principles of policy. In the Conclusion I will offer some reflections on the claims of childcare policy and the scope for a distinctive social policy agenda in Wales. These will be provisional and a basis for examining the interview data with policy actors and parents in subsequent chapters.

SECTION ONE: POLICY INNOVATION, DISCURSIVE FRAMES AND 'CONDENSATION SYMBOLS' IN POST-DEVOLUTION WALES.

This analysis of policy is based on policy texts on the Assembly web-site [xxii] relating to three arenas that have been claimed as a priority. These arenas are significant in that they represent guiding principles or political values that are claimed to drive the policy-making process across the whole range of agendas for which the Assembly is responsible. The concept of 'inclusiveness' has been very significant in the way devolution has been understood in Wales as an opportunity for a new way of doing

politics (Laffin and Thomas, 2000; McAllister, 2000) and in the Assembly's policy agenda (Chaney and Fevre, 2001). The three guiding principles selected for discussion in relation to childcare can all be linked to this attention to 'being inclusive'. These priorities are first, those concerning gender equality, second, those relating to social justice and social inclusion issues and finally, those addressing children' rights. These are discussed in turn.

(a) gender equality

According to Rees, the Assembly was set up with 'a clear intention to avoid the Westminster style of government' (2002: 62) with implications for gender politics and issues of inclusive participation in governance (Chaney and Fevre, 2001). The progress of the Assembly in pursuing equality of opportunity and gender equality gives some grounds for optimism and lends support to the claim that 'devolution offers an unprecedented opportunity for the furthering of equality in Wales' (C.Williams, 2001: 57). There is evidence of political values and initiatives that may reshape the political opportunity structure (Ball and Charles, 2006; Charles, 2004; NAfW, 2001a) and this can be seen in part as an outcome of feminist struggle.

When the National Assembly for Wales was established through the Government of Wales Act 1998 this legislation included a statutory duty that it should:

> make appropriate arrangements with a view to securing that its functions are exercised with due regard to the principle that there should be equality of opportunity for all people. (Government of Wales Act 1998, Section 120)

The inclusion of the equality clause was the result of successful lobbying by equality campaigners including those active in the women's movement (Chaney, 2004; Chaney and Fevre, 2002). This duty to promote equality is enshrined in the structure and operations of the Assembly. In addition it means that Wales is unique in the UK in embracing a legal duty at Government level to promote equality of opportunity for all people. This goes further than the overall UK legislation where the expectation is that individuals who believe they have experienced discrimination have to seek redress (Chaney and Fevre, 2002). It means that all policies and practices have to be reviewed by the Assembly to ensure they fulfil the equality duty. As Chaney puts it, the Duty 'is singular in its non-prescriptive phrasing and all-embracing scope and is an *imperative* that applies to *all* people and *all* functions of government' (2004: 66).

Changes in the patterns of women's political representation in Wales in the context of devolution have also attracted some interest (Edwards and McAllister, 2002; Mackay, 2004). In 1999 the first elections to the National Assembly for Wales were held and a high proportion (40%) of women representatives was returned. In 2003 this proportion increased to 50 percent which was hailed by the Guardian newspaper as a 'world record' for a legislative body (Watt, 2003). Some of the women who were elected to the Assembly had previously been involved in equality issues (Rees, 2002; C.Williams, 2001). Both the Labour Party and Plaid Cymru had adopted policies designed to improve the representation of women for the Assembly elections (Edwards and McAllister, 2002). This new gender balance in political representation coupled with the Statutory Duty raised expectations about the developments of policies that would address women's issues. Further confirmation of the Assembly's commitment to the promotion of equal opportunities was the inclusion of this as a

cross-cutting theme and value in its first strategic plan *www.betterwales.com* (NafW, 2000a) [xxiii] (Chaney and Fevre, 2002; C.Williams, 2001). The National Assembly for Wales set up an Equality of Opportunity Committee and an Equality Policy Unit in order to progress the requirements established by the Statutory Equality Duty. The Equality of Opportunity Committee has responsibility for evaluating progress made within the Assembly towards meeting the Duty. The Equality Policy Unit provides policy guidance and advice and is intended to support the Assembly in meeting equality objectives. The key principle driving developments is that of mainstreaming equality, including gender equality, in all policy developments (Edwards, 2004; NAfW, 2004; Rees, 2002; C.Williams, 2001):

> Key to the delivery of the equality vision is the principle of mainstreaming, that is, the integration of equality of opportunity principles, strategies and actions into the everyday work of government. (NAfW, 2005: 4, para 1.3)

The European Union and New Labour as well as the Assembly are all committed to mainstreaming equality (Beveridge *et al*, 2000; Duncan, 2002). The Assembly's policy review report on 'Mainstreaming Equality' (NAfW, 2004) proposed the following definition of 'mainstreaming':

> 'Mainstreaming' equality is about the integration of respect for diversity and equality of opportunity principles, strategies and practices into the every day work of the Assembly and other public bodies. It means that equality issues should be included from the outset as an integral part of the policy-making and service delivery process and the achievement of equality should inform all aspects of the work of every individual within an organisation. The success of mainstreaming should be measured by evaluating whether inequalities have been reduced. (NAfW, 2004: 6, Para 2.3)

This definition of mainstreaming remains open to competing interpretations, particularly with regard to how a reduction in inequalities is to be measured. How,

for example, would the Committee measure a reduction of inequalities through childcare and parenting policy? This question can be examined in relation to the distinction between role equity and role change issues (Gelb and Palley, 1982). Role equity issues can be accommodated within the discourse of liberalism and underpin policies directed towards equal rights and social justice such as campaigns for equal pay and equal access to existing opportunities. Role change issues, however, are more challenging as they involve a redistribution of resources and a fundamental review of existing gendered practices (Ball and Charles, 2006). Mainstreaming may be limited to the issues of equal pay and equal access associated with a role equity agenda. However, as Rees indicates, if gender mainstreaming addresses role change issues this would entail a challenge to the 'breadwinner/ home-maker gender contract' (1999: 179) and would seek to redistribute labour at home as well as in paid work.

Childcare and parenting policy offers an ideal arena in which to explore how gender mainstreaming operates within the Assembly in practice, especially with regard to the declared goal of achieving a reduction in inequalities. Devolution, the statutory equality duty and support for gender mainstreaming provide a specific context for the pursuit of childcare policy in Wales and there is the potential to raise some important questions about gender relations in caring for children. The emphasis on gender equality as a guiding political value may act as a 'policy window' (Marshall, 1997) for activists wishing to ensure recognition and redistribution claims (Fraser, 1997; 2001) are addressed in key areas. I will return to this in the analysis of childcare policy in Section Two.

Hence, in Connell's terms (1990) there is room for hope that the Assembly may indeed act as a creative force in changing the gender order. However, this leaves open the question of how demands over gender are articulated, which issues are seen by policy actors inside and outside the Assembly as a priority, and how those issues fare in the process of placing them on the agenda through to achieving substantive changes. In developing a feminist standpoint on childcare and parenting policy in Wales I have focused especially on how policy addresses gender roles and gender inequalities. As I shall demonstrate in Section Two, there is little evidence that gender equality has been a guiding principle in relation to childcare or that feminist activists are pressing for women's rights in this sphere, other than in relation to achieving equal access to paid work opportunities.

(b) Social justice issues:

The Assembly established the promotion of social justice and social inclusion as a key priority during its first term of Office. In the Assembly's first strategic plan *www.betterwales.com* (NAfW, 2000a) the guiding principles of 'A Made in Wales Agenda' are proposed. One of the three major themes identified is 'Tackling Social Disadvantage' involving 'the development of an inclusive society where everyone has the chance to fulfil their potential' (NAfW, 2000a: 7). In the *Plan for Wales 2001* 'Social Inclusion' is identified as one of three guiding principles alongside 'Equal Opportunities' and 'Sustainable Development' (NAfW, 2001a: 3). This focus takes place in a context in which poverty levels in Wales exceed those in Britain overall (Bransbury, 2004) and the problem of low pay for those in work has been a long-standing concern (Brooksbank, 2001).

Tackling social disadvantage is addressed in partnership with local government and is funded through the Communities First initiative. This is an initiative targeting the most deprived areas of Wales for community regeneration programmes where a variety of agencies work with local communities to tackle local problems. In addition to this targeting of specific geographical communities all local authorities are charged with a duty under the Local Government Act 2000 to develop a 'community strategy' for their area in collaboration with local communities and organisations in the public, private and voluntary sectors. Among other things these are expected to consider the issues of poverty and social disadvantage (NAf W, 2001a).

The discourse of social inclusion examined in Chapter Three appears to be prominent in Wales as it is in England and this suggests that New Labour has achieved hegemony in the political language and 'condensation symbols' (Edelman, 1964) adopted to drive welfare reform. As Lynda Bransbury comments 'It is inevitable with Labour-led administrations in Westminster and Cardiff that the overall vision and flagship policies must be similar' (2004: 180). It may be premature to accept that the guiding principles identified in Assembly policies and strategies can justifiably be claimed to form part of a distinctive 'made in Wales' agenda, although there is considerable passion in the way the Assembly is progressing the commitment to 'inclusiveness' (Chaney and Fevre, 2001). Moreover, there are differences within the Labour Party over interpretations of social inclusion connected with the competing political values of 'Old Labour' and 'New Labour'. As Michael Sullivan (2004) has argued, the Labour Party is differentiated and there is evidence of divergence in philosophy between Labour in Cardiff and in London. In Chapter Three I referred to

the growing concern that the focus on social exclusion could sideline issues of equality and redistribution (Lister, 1998). The Welsh Assembly Government has declared itself to be committed to *both* tackling social exclusion *and* pursuing equality. In this sense there is the possibility that social inclusion/ exclusion is understood in different ways in Wales in comparison with England. There may be greater support for a redistributive egalitarian understanding of social inclusion (Levitas, 1998) and this represents a difference in the discursive framing of social justice issues that could provide opportunities for anti-poverty social movement organisations seeking to influence policy. However, in the absence of Assembly control of employment, taxation and benefits policy this could remain largely a difference of style and vision rather than practice. Moreover, any divergence is still contained within the boundaries of Labour Party politics. It is a matter of conjecture as to whether there could be greater conflict between Westminster and Cardiff should different parties be elected to govern in the future.

Key documents do not provide definitions of key concepts or explore the relationship between them. In addition related concepts such as 'poverty', social disadvantage' and 'deprivation' appear to be used interchangeably with the concept of social exclusion. As Paul Chaney and Ralph Fevre observe 'if 'inclusiveness' is to be anything more than an effective word for conjuring up the *Zeitgeist* of devolution in Wales post-1995, further conceptual clarity is needed' (2001: 43). With this in mind my interviews with policy actors at regional level explored understandings of inclusion and it was suggested that there was a difference of emphasis in Wales, confirming Michael Sullivan's (2004) claims that different political values are a priority for Labour in post-devolution Wales. I shall explore this evidence in the next Chapter.

The commitment to the principle of social justice was progressed further in May 2003 with the designation of a Minister for Social Justice and Regeneration within the Assembly Cabinet. The Minister's work is supported through the Social Justice and Regeneration Department and Social Justice and Regeneration Committee. Following the publication of Annual Reports on Social Inclusion in Wales between 2001 and 2003 (NAfW, 2001b; WAG, 2002b; 2003a) the new Minister published the first report on relevant policies and programmes relating to social justice in 2004 (WAG, 2004a). The concept of social justice appears to be taken as self-explanatory and there is a failure to acknowledge that there may be competing definitions. An understanding of social justice remains implicit in statements such as the following:

> Social justice is about every one of us having the chances and opportunities to make the most of our lives and use our talents to the full. Social justice touches on all aspects of life from our health as babies to our care as older people. (WAG, 2004a: 4)
>
> Social justice will only be delivered by improving public services for all, by tackling the social, educational and economic barriers that create inequality and by working to end poverty. (WAGa, 2004: 5)

Among the key policies and programmes that are identified in the report are policies on social inclusion and on equality and participation. The Equality Policy Unit referred to earlier is located within the Social Justice and Regeneration Department. However, the particular ways that commitment to social justice, social inclusion and equality may *connect* with each other in a specific policy area such as childcare are not clear. It requires a close reading of childcare policy documents and discussions with those involved in the creation and interpretation of policy to tease out these connections.

There are plural notions of justice and there may be tension between competing notions (Gewirtz and Cribb, 2002). Sally Power and Sharon Gewirtz (2001) adapt Fraser's (1997) distinction between *economic* injustices and *cultural* injustices that she suggests can be redressed by a politics of *redistribution* of resources and a politics of *recognition* for cultural practices respectively. By doing this 'it becomes clear that not all injustices are of the same order and that different forms of injustice require different remedies' (Power and Gewirtz, 2001: 41). Injustices based on 'gender' may be the consequences of both economic and cultural injustices. The mother confined to her home, caring for her young children, may experience economic dependency (an economic injustice) and a sense of worthlessness (a cultural injustice) in a society that focuses on paid work as the route to independence and inclusion. In this case there is a need for care within the home to be culturally recognised and valued but there also needs to be a redistribution of economic resources so that the mother may achieve independence. It seems evident that cultural injustices must be recognised in order for economic injustices to be remedied. However, in practice policy may focus on one form of injustice without working through how it connects with the other form of injustice, thus leading to a situation where remedies 'may be contradictory and work against each other' (Power and Gewirtz, 2001: 41). A childcare policy contained within an economic frame that rewards paid work and fails to value unpaid care, for example, will do nothing to redress the stresses and hardships of those that may have to or want to commit their time to unpaid care. Some of these gaps in understanding will be illustrated with regard to childcare policy in Wales in Section Two.

The Assembly's anti-poverty and social inclusion work has recently focused on child poverty (Bransbury, 2004). This needs to be placed in the context of New Labour's commitment to end child poverty referred to in Chapter Three. Furthermore, as Lynda Bransbury (2004) has pointed out, the commitment to developing a Child Poverty Strategy for Wales did not emerge until 2003 and was a consequence of concern expressed by the Children's Commissioner for Wales (Children's Commissioner for Wales, 2002). The *Report of the Child Poverty Task Group* went out for consultation in June 2004 (CPTG, 2004) and the Assembly Government now has a Child Poverty Strategy for Wales, *A Fair Future for our Children*, (WAG, 2005a). The Task Group had identified improved childcare provision as a route to tackling child poverty and subsequently made recommendations in relation to the need for flexible employment policies, for the provision of accessible and affordable childcare and quality childcare provision for disabled children. The Child Poverty Strategy for Wales referred to early years services, Sure Start and Childcare and Family Support as arenas that would form part of the framework to tackle poverty and promote the well-being of children. These arenas are discussed further in Section Two.

(c) Children's welfare and children's rights.

In Chapter Three I referred to New Labour's claim to place children's needs and interests at the heart of its policy agenda. This child-centred approach is highly visible in Wales and at times the Assembly has claimed the focus on children and young people as one of the ways in which Wales is following a distinctive route. As I shall illustrate later, the making of childcare policy in Wales has to be understood in

relation to this celebration of children's rights. This is the key discursive frame for understanding childcare policy. Yet given the evidence discussed in Chapter Three that the framing of social policy in relation to children's interests goes beyond Wales and, indeed, beyond the UK, it is necessary to explore how far claims for distinctiveness in Wales are justified. It is for this reason that Welsh policy on children's welfare and children's rights is discussed in detail in this section. A brief overview of policy developments at the UK level was provided in Chapter Three. However, the reader will need to refer to the Children Act 2004 [xxiv] and the *Every Child Matters* programme [xxv] for further detail concerning differences between England and Wales in the implementation of legislation and policies for children and young people.

Wales is unique in the UK in that it was the first country to appoint an independent Children's Commissioner, Mr Peter Clarke, who has been in office since March 2001. This is an approach supported by the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child in promoting the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (J.Williams, 2005). At the time that the Assembly made a commitment to having a Children's Commissioner, the UK Government was unwilling to go down this route (Bransbury, 2004). According to Lynda Bransbury the Assembly's decision 'was therefore an immediate demonstration of the possibilities created by devolution. It was also tangible evidence of a rights-based approach and the promise of new and more collaborative governance in Wales' (2004: 178). It is significant that the first Act of Parliament specific to Wales was the *Children's Commissioner for Wales Act 2001* which extended the powers of the Children's Commissioner for Wales (Catriona Williams, 2003). According to the

Children's Commissioner for Wales, this Act represented 'a small piece of legislative history' in that this was 'the first time that a public official has been charged with certain particular responsibilities under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child '(Clarke, 2002: 288). Whilst there are now Children's Commissioners for Wales, Northern Ireland, Scotland and England, their role and powers are defined in different ways. And, as Jane Williams explains, Wales remains exceptional in that the Children's Commissioner 'has the most extensive powers to provide advice and assistance and to deal with complaints and investigations in individual cases' (J.Williams, 2005: 41). Following the 2001 Act the Commissioner's role was extended to include the following:

- The power to review the effect of policies, and delivery of services to children.
- The extension of the Commissioner's remit beyond services directly provided for children (e.g education, social care) to other areas (e.g environment, economic development).
  (Children's Commissioner for Wales, 2002: 3)

It is also significant that the Children's Commissioner is independent and has powers to review the policies and activities of the Assembly itself. The establishment of the Office of the Children's Commissioner is a firm example of the commitment of the Assembly to affirming the welfare and rights of children and young people in ways that may be distinctive from New Labour at UK Government level. This is also an indication of the broader commitment to a style of governance that is open, inclusive and accessible (Catriona Williams, 2003).

In placing children and young people at the heart of its policy agendas the Assembly also adopted its Core Aims for Children and Young People (WAG, 2004b) [xxvi].

These are informed by the principles of the UNCRC and the core aims are intended to underpin all services for children and young people, including early years education and childcare services. These Core Aims seem distinctive in their focus on *rights* as well as needs when compared with the five outcomes for children specified by the UK Government in the *Every Child Matters* programme and subsequently included in the Children Act 2004[xxvii]. Childcare Policy in Wales has, therefore, evolved within this framework of concern for meeting children and young people's needs *and* rights and ensuring policies are integrated. It is, therefore, appropriate at this point to examine the key policies relating to children's welfare and children's rights that connect with childcare policy. These are presented first in Box 6:

BOX 6: POLICY FOR CHILDREN IN WALES, 1999 TO 2006.[xxviii xxix]

Date	Policy Initiative
September 2000	*Extending Entitlement: supporting young people in Wales*, NAfW, 2000b.
November 2000	*Children and Young People: a Framework for Partnership*, NAfW, 2000c.
June 2001	*Moving Forward- Listening to Children and Young People. A Proposal for Consultation*, NAfW, 2001c.
July 2002	**Framework for *Partnership* Guidance issued by WAG as a set of the following documents:** Forward and Executive Summary, *Improving Services for Children and Young People: A Framework for Partnership*, WAG, 2002c. *Children and Young People's Framework Planning Guidance*, WAG, 2002d. *Early Entitlement: Supporting Children and Families in Wales*, WAG, 2002e. (superseded by new guidance issued in Circular 27/2003, WAG, 2003b) *Cymorth: Children and Youth Support Fund Guidance*, WAG, 2002f. *Extending Entitlement- Direction and Guidance*, WAG, 2002g.
January 2004	*Children and Young People: Rights to Action*, WAG, 2004a.
2004	*Children Act 2004* includes the introduction of duties with implications for Children's Services in Wales. The Assembly has published guidance on what this legislation will mean for Wales.

The publication of *Extending Entitlement: supporting young people in Wales* (NAfW, 2000b) and *Children and Young People: a Framework for Partnership* (NAfW, 2000c) started a process directed towards improving services for children and young people and ensuring their participation in developments. The Assembly's commitment to consulting on key proposals and working in partnership with children and young people and relevant agencies working on behalf of children and young people is highly visible as we trace the evolution of policy.

In July 2002 the Assembly issued a guidance set entitled *Framework for Partnership* comprising various documents resulting from earlier consultations and containing proposals designed to integrate policies and services for children and young people and to secure their involvement in service delivery at the local level. The priority was 'to make the planning and delivery of services for children and young people by local agencies more coherent and cross cutting' (WAG, 2002d: 1, Para 1.1). The guidance proposed the establishment of local *Children and Young People's Partnerships* charged with the task of developing a strategic Framework for all services for children and young people aged from birth to 25 years. The Framework would take the form of a 5- year strategy for children and young people. The Framework is intended to link to the local authority's *Community Strategy*. It also proposed that there should be two sub-groups. One sub-group would be a *Children's Partnership* for children aged from birth to 10 years with a role to improve services in the context of guidance issued in *Early Entitlement: Supporting Children and Families in Wales* (WAG, 2002e). The Children's Partnership was to have a brief to produce a Children's Plan for the local authority area. The other sub-group would be a *Young People's Partnership* which would have a comparable role for the 11 to 25

years age group in the context of the *Extending Entitlement* (WAG, 2002g) guidance. This Partnership would be expected to develop a Young People's Strategy for the area.

Alongside these new arrangements for service planning, the Assembly introduced a new funding stream called Cymorth, the Children and Youth Support Fund (WAG, 2002f) beginning in 2003. This was a replacement for 5 funding streams that had previously been separate (Sure Start, Children and Youth Partnership Fund, National Childcare Strategy, Youth Access Initiative, Play Grant) and responsibility for administering the fund was placed with the local Framework Partnerships. This is comparable to the Children's Fund in England that was launched in November 2000 with the aim of tackling disadvantage among children and young people. It was stated that the key aim of Cymorth 'is to make targeted services more effective in breaking the cycle of deprivation that affects children and young people's life chances' (WAG, 2004c: 6). Significantly childcare and family and parenting support have been identified as two of the six areas of priority for Cymorth funding.[xxx] Receipt of Cymorth funding rests on the Framework Partnerships developing and submitting the relevant plans to the Assembly including a Cymorth Plan. In addition to the targeted funding provided through Cymorth, the local planning for children and young people within the new Framework Partnerships and sub-groups is intended to influence the range of other available funding. This includes other specific grants and mainstream discretionary funding (WAG, 2003c).

The new arrangements for planning local services for children and young people are represented in Diagram One. As explained in more detail above, the Assembly

exercises control over the planning process through issuing guidance and making allocation of funding dependant on receipt of satisfactory plans. The lower tier partnerships have specific responsibilities, as already described, but work within the parameters agreed by the higher level partnerships and, ultimately, Assembly guidance. The flow of information, therefore, is downward in terms of guidance and upward in terms of the submission of plans.

DIAGRAM 1: A FRAMEWORK FOR PARTNERSHIP ARRANGEMENTS AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

The Welsh Assembly

Introduced Cymorth programme in 2003 and provides funding to local CYP Framework Partnerships on receipt of their Cymorth Plan.

Local Level Community Strategy/Plan

All local authorities in England and Wales are required to prepare a Community Strategy/ Plan in partnership with the public, private, voluntary and community sectors. This Plan has shared ownership and is distinct from the local Improvement Plan owned by the Local Authority. There is a Local Strategic Partnership called the Community Planning Alliance and a smaller Key Partners Group to oversee the process. The Community Plan is published for public consultation and is submitted to the Assembly. As these Strategic Partnerships are expected to act as 'the key overarching partnership for each local authority area' (WAG, 2002h: 11), it is expected that other Partnerships should develop their plans with regard to the priorities of the Community Strategy.

Children and Young People's Framework Partnership

Prepares 5-year strategy, The Children and Young People's Framework, by October 2003

Annual Reports to Assembly beginning October 2003

Develop Cymorth Plan for submission to Assembly by October 2002 and on annual basis

Children's Partnership (Early Entitlement)	**Young People's Partnership[xxxi] (Extending Entitlement)**
Prepares 5-year strategy, the Children's Plan by October 2003	**Prepares 5-year strategy, the Young People's Plan by July 2002**
Annual Reports to Assembly beginning October 2003	**Annual Reports to Assembly Beginning in March 2004**

With regard to the age group of children relevant to my research (birth to 11 years) and my focus on childcare and parenting support, the work of the new *Children's Partnerships* is particularly important. These Partnerships bring together partners working in the statutory, voluntary and independent sectors and each local authority is responsible for taking a lead in establishing the Partnership. The Children's Partnership is expected to develop a Children's Plan for a 5-year period but reviewed annually through the preparation of an Annual Report. The Partnership is expected to ensure children and families are able to contribute to the process and to give feedback.

These new planning arrangements are important for childcare because they have impacted on the Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships (EYDCPs) that are responsible for planning both early years education and childcare at the local authority area level. Local Education Authorities in England and Wales were required to set up an Early Years Development Partnership under Section 119 of the 1998 School Standards and Framework Act. The role of the Partnership was to review the provision of nursery education for the authority's area and to prepare an early years development plan. The Education Act 2002 subsequently amended these duties to include responsibility for childcare provision. Early Years Development Partnerships were renamed as Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships charged with the responsibility for preparing an early years development and childcare plan. In addition to their existing duties with regard to nursery education, these Partnerships were now responsible for conducting an annual review of the sufficiency of childcare for the local education authority area. The Education Act 2002 also laid a statutory duty on local education authorities to provide a public

information service on childcare and related services [xxxii]. The landscape will change again following the Childcare Act 2006 which requires local authorities in England and Wales to ensure there is 'sufficient childcare for working parents' (2006: paragraphs 6 and 22).

These mechanisms for meeting these statutory duties were influenced by the Framework for Partnership guidance. This provides one example of how legislation relating to England and Wales may be reshaped by Assembly guidance. Under Assembly guidance (WAG, 2003b) Local Education Authorities have two options regarding the place of their EYDCP. Either their Children's Partnership can function also as the EYDCP or the EYDCP can be a sub-group of the Children's Partnership. The planning process was amended so that the plans for childcare would now be included in the Cymorth Plan and this would be submitted to the Assembly alongside the Early Years Development Plan and Children's Plan. With regard to the frameworks for planning, childcare is thus understood as one of a range of services for *children and young people* rather than for their *parents*. In the process, attention to links between childcare and gender appear to have been sidelined completely. In addition the location of childcare within the Cymorth planning process means that it is contained within a programme that is targeted towards areas and communities of need even though many parents needing and using childcare will not be located within those targeted groups. The arrangement for childcare contrasts with early years provision which continues to be planned separately from Cymorth and where there is a *universal* entitlement to a free nursery education place once children reach a certain age. The historic division between early years education and childcare and between targeted and universal children's services has been reinforced rather than

integrated by these planning arrangements. If childcare is to be genuinely a service for all children it seems odd that it is now planned within a programme targeted towards only those children defined as being vulnerable. There is a conflict here between the Assembly's policy rhetoric that childcare is for all children and the availability of resources, which requires that there is careful targeting. These tensions will be discussed further in Section Two and in subsequent chapters.

Whilst these were the arrangements that were evolving within Wales during the period of fieldwork it must be noted that the *Children Act 2004* has implications for the arrangements for services for children and young people in England and Wales, with Part Three being specific to Wales:

- Section 25 of the Act introduced a duty for each children's services authority (the local authority) in Wales to make arrangements to ensure co-operation between the authority, relevant partners and other relevant bodies to improve the well-being of children in the area;
- Section 26 of the Act gave the Assembly the power to require local authorities to develop a plan for services to children and young people.
- Section 27 of the Act concerns the requirement that local authorities each appoint a lead director for children and young people's services and designate an elected member as the lead member for those services.
- Section 28 of the Act concerns arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and applies to key organisations that have contact with children and young people. [xxxiii]

The Act has thus enabled the Assembly to build on the Framework arrangements by putting them on a statutory footing. The Assembly has now begun a process of consultation on the draft regulations and guidance relating to the Act with certain provisions in place by April 2006 (WAG, 2005b; 2005c; 2005d). It is important to note that each Children's Services Authority is required under the Act to 'have

regard to the importance of parents and other persons caring for children in improving the well-being of children' (Children Act 2004, Section 25 (3)). In this sense parents *are* taken into account in the planning process but only in relation to the needs of the child.

In Section One I have identified three areas of Assembly policy that are claimed to be key political values driving its social policy agenda: gender equality, social justice and children's welfare. These are also areas addressed in New Labour social policy and discussed in Chapter Three. However, I have argued that these values may be understood in different ways in Wales and this is a matter for further consideration in Section Two and Chapter Five.

SECTION TWO: THE HISTORY OF CHILDCARE POLICY IN WALES, 1999 TO 2006

I will reconstruct the development of childcare and parenting policies in the period following devolution. I explore the framing of these policies and assess the extent to which the policy processes around childcare and parenting are driven by the principles of gender equality, children's rights and social justice.

Childcare has been claimed as a feminist issue in the history of the Women's Movement (Lovenduski and Randall, 1993) and there was a national feminist campaign for childcare in the 1980s which demanded 'comprehensive, flexible, free, democratically controlled childcare facilities funded by the state' (cited in Randall, 1996a: 488). However, according to Randall there was 'a process of

deradicalisation' (1996a: 492) and the framing of childcare as a woman's right eventually gave way to it being framed as an economic need. There is some agreement that childcare has been largely neglected in comparison with other feminist issues (Franzway *et al*, 1989; Randall, 1996a) and I argued in Chapter Three that New Labour has failed to frame childcare in a way that engages fully with gender equity issues. So what has happened so far in Wales?

The National Childcare Strategy (DfEE, 1998) is intended for implementation in England. Policy relating to the development of childcare in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland was devolved to their respective Governments with the expectation that the Secretaries of State in those countries would publish their own documents on childcare. Subsequent policy and legislation outlined in the previous chapter covers both reserved areas such as the Tax Credit System and Maternity and Paternity Rights and devolved areas. Hence, the evolution of childcare policy in Wales is complex. Following devolution, policy-makers in Wales have been free to develop their own agenda for childcare but within limits.

In this section I will begin with a historical reconstruction of the evolution of childcare policy in Wales between 1999 to 2006. The key policy texts and initiatives are summarised in Box 7 [xxxiv].

BOX 7: CHILDCARE POLICY IN WALES, 1999 TO 2006.

Date	Policy Development
1998	*The National Childcare Strategy in Wales*, Welsh Office.
1999	*Childcare in Wales*, Welsh Affairs Select Committee, 6th Special Report, HC 156, 21 June.
2001	*National Childcare Strategy Task Force Report*, November. (Task Force established In February by Jane Hutt, Minister for Health and Social Services). (NCSTF, 2001)
2002	*Childcare Action Plan*, Welsh Assembly Government, May. (WAG, 2002a)
2003	Childcare Working Group established by Assembly Government in December and chaired by Deputy Minister for Economic Development and Transport, Brian Gibbons.
2004	*Childcare Working Group Interim Report* published for consultation on 1st June with deadline for responses on 30 September 2004. (WAG, CWG, 2004)
2005	*A Flying Start. Childcare for children, parents and communities*, Welsh Assembly Government Childcare Working Group, Final Report, February. (WAG, CWG, 2005)
2005	*The Childcare Strategy for Wales: Childcare is for Children*, Welsh Assembly Government, DfTE Information Document No: 047-05, November. (WAG, 2005e)
2005	*Flying Start*, Welsh Assembly Government Consultation Document, November for responses by February 2006. (WAG, 2005f) This is an initiative allied to the Assembly's Child Poverty Strategy and targeted towards disadvantaged areas.
2005	*Parenting Action Plan: Supporting mothers, fathers and carers with raising children in Wales*, Welsh Assembly Government, DfTE Information Document No: 054-05, December. (WAG, 2005g)

My fieldwork took place between 2003 to 2004 meaning that some of the policy developments discussed here had not yet evolved. The focus of this section is on childcare policy but I will also discuss parenting policy in Wales given the significance of this in the New Labour agenda.

There are three main landmarks in the history of childcare policy following devolution that will be used to organise my analysis. First, the establishment of the Welsh Affairs Select Committee to consider views on childcare in Wales (Welsh Affairs Select Committee, 1999). Secondly, the publication of the Wales Childcare Action Plan (WAG, 2002a). Thirdly, the publication of the final report of the Child Care Working Group (WAG, CWG, 2005) leading to the Childcare Strategy for Wales (WAG, 2005e).

(a) The Welsh Affairs Select Committee

The Welsh Office encountered considerable criticism within Wales when it published the Green Paper *The National Childcare Strategy in Wales* (Welsh Office, 1998). Critics claimed that the main proposals represented those in the English Strategy, did not reflect Welsh differences, and did not incorporate views put forward during consultation in Wales and by the Childcare Strategy Task Group that had been established by the Welsh Office. An inquiry into childcare by the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs followed (Welsh Affairs Select Committee, 1999). These proceedings illuminate potential tensions in the policy processes surrounding the issue of childcare. They provide a picture of those groups active in the field of childcare policy in Wales and indicate their key priorities. This evidence is

considered here in order to illuminate where there is divergence or consensus between the various actors within the policy-making process with regard to the framing of childcare policy (Ball and Charles, 2006).

The establishment of the Select Committee in response to the widespread dissatisfaction with the Welsh Office Green Paper (1998) indicated an open political apparatus, perhaps to be expected in the climate of optimism surrounding devolution. The Select Committee provided an opening in the political opportunity structure (Ball and Charles, 2006) at a crucial point in the history of Wales- shortly before the transition of power to the National Assembly for Wales. Social movements and organisations with an interest in childcare had an unprecedented opportunity to express their interests at a time of considerable optimism about the future of Welsh politics.

I was especially interested in the issues placed on the agenda by those that gave evidence and how their concerns over childcare were framed and the extent to which these linked to either feminist or gender equality agendas. However, I was also concerned to identify any competing discursive frames. I was interested in how members of the Select Committee responded to the evidence of different contributors and how subsequent policy texts treated competing demands. These questions form the basis of the analysis of each organisation's evidence and the template used for analysis is in Appendix 6. Those organisations that submitted evidence fall into a number of distinct categories (although with some interests that overlap) and these are represented in Box 8.

BOX 8: A SUMMARY OF THE ORGANISATIONS THAT SUBMITTED EVIDENCE TO THE WELSH AFFAIRS SELECT COMMITTEE, 1999 [xxxv]

CATEGORY	ORGANISATION
CHILDREN'S INTERESTS	Children in Wales Play Wales Barnardos NSPCC CYMRU/WALES [xxxvi] SCOVO [xxxvii]
WOMEN'S NEEDS/GENDER EQUALITY	Minority Ethnic Women's Network Chwarae Teg (Fair Play) Federation of Small Businesses Wales Equal Opportunities Commission Wales
CHILDCARE AND EARLY YEARS EDUCATION	Wales Pre-School Playgroups Association Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin [xxxviii] National Childminding Association in Wales Children's Information Bureau, Wrexham County Borough Council. Wrexham Early years Forum. Kids' Clubs Network Gibbonsdown Children's Centre, Barry
ECONOMIC/ EMPLOYMENT	Chwarae Teg Wales Trade Union Congress Federation of Small Businesses Wales Community Enterprise Wales Council of Welsh Training and Enterprise Councils Confederation of British Industry Wales Employment Service (Wales) Inland Revenue Welsh Development Agency
POLITICAL/ GOVERNMENT	Welsh Local Government Association Welsh Office New Opportunities Fund Association of Directors of Social Services in Wales
EDUCATION	Welsh Funding Councils

The organisations that submitted evidence covered welfare, economic and political interests and economic interests were especially well represented with the submissions of some of the organisations listed in other categories focusing on questions relating to economic strategy. However, those organisations representing children tended to question the delivery of childcare policy in the context of welfare to work priorities. Many of these organisations sought to reframe childcare policy in relation to children's needs. In contrast there was little evidence of organisations pursuing either an agenda in relation to women's needs or to the goal of gender equality. There were no organisations with an explicitly feminist agenda that submitted evidence. The only three submissions from bodies with a link to gender equality issues were the Equal Opportunities Commission in Wales, Chwarae Teg (Fair Play) and the Minority Ethnic Women's Network. In addition the Federation of Small Businesses Wales has been included because it presented a strong case for looking at the specific needs of self-employed women with children. Let us examine these submissions in more detail.

First, the Equal Opportunities Commission in Wales presented written evidence that framed childcare in relation to equal opportunities discourse and economic needs. The focus was on the achievement of gender equality through economic participation. Although the submission made brief reference to the need for employment policies to encourage a more equal sharing of responsibilities at home, there was no attempt to represent the interests of unpaid carers. The main body with responsibility to promote gender equality in Wales thus seemed to take a limited view of the issues involved. This approach to framing the issues relates to Lister's (1997) gender-neutral model of citizenship based on universal rights, reproducing the

dichotomy between the public and the private spheres. Second, Chwarae Teg (Fair Play), a body established to expand the role of women in the labour market in Wales, framed childcare in relation to an economic agenda and the needs of the Welsh economy. The submission was presented in a gender- neutral language and the references to women's needs were confined to comments relating to their work experience. The Federation of Small Businesses Wales, in contrast, made a convincing case for the specific needs of women with children to be taken into account. This relates to Lister's (1997) gender-differentiated model of citizenship based on particularistic claims. This organisation presented research evidence to highlight the difficulties self-employed women with children often face. Proposals based on the principle of positive action were put forward. Whilst the Select Committee noted that they were very impressed with this submission one member did question these proposals which he referred to as 'preferential treatment' for self-employed single women that could not be justified given that other groups were 'equally needy" (Welsh Affairs Select Committee, 1999, Question Number 346). Finally, the Minority Ethnic Women's Nework (MEWN) was the only organisation that was concerned with meeting the specific welfare needs of women. Whilst the organisation would not be described as feminist it does support and provide women - only training as part of a positive action strategy. In its submission it outlined its interest in the provision of women only training in childcare to meet the ethnic and religious preferences of some Muslim women. There is, therefore, concern to meet needs of women in relation to ethnic and religious preferences. There appeared to be some resistance from Select Committee members to the notion of women-only provision as the Chair of the Select Committee asked "Is there possibly a risk of concentrating on the needs of women rather than the needs of children?" (Welsh

Affairs Select Committee, 1999, Question 70). In response Geta Aldridge (MEWN) explained "Unless we consult with women we are not going to focus on the children. Women in the ethnic minority community are the carers". (Welsh Affairs Select Committee, 1999, Question 70). This supports claims that there is a need for a care strategy that takes gender relations seriously so that the needs of children and their carers are recognised in policy. MEWN was the only organisation to indicate a link between women's needs and children's needs and yet they encountered some resistance. The confusion of the Select Committee can be explored through the two models of citizenship identified by Lister (1997). The use of gender neutral language in relation to meeting parental needs links with the model of access to universal citizenship rights. There was a reluctance to use the discourse of gender differentiation meaning that the Select Committee failed to distinguish the possibility of claims relating to recognition for care and the 'gendered moral rationalities' of women in some communities that place them as primary carers.

The foregoing analysis points to a tension between different interests and ways of framing childcare. First, were those organisations representing the interests of children who argued for childcare policy to be framed as part of the children's rights agenda. In many cases these groups were vociferous in their critique of the delivery of policy through the welfare to work agenda. It was claimed this would not necessarily meet the needs of children, especially in the poorest communities. Second, were those groups who framed childcare largely in relation to the needs of working parents and to improve the Welsh economy. Hence, childcare was seen as part of a wider economic strategy. Support for parents was confined to assisting their move into employment through the welfare to work programmes and other

mechanisms. There were some organisations paying attention to gender equality but this was not so well developed and was contained mainly within the discourse of role equity in paid work. In most cases organisations were presenting their claims within discursive frames that resonate with different aspects of New Labour policy and the Assembly's core values. The fact that these different strands of policy may not fit together easily does not prevent different interests from drawing on those strands that fit their own agenda. Those organisations such as the Federation of Small Businesses, Wales and MEWN that spoke the language of positive action for women and recognition of the role of carers appeared to be less effective. These proceedings provide an indication that childcare is an arena that concerns a variety of interest groups within and beyond the regional state and the framing of the issue is contested. Those organisations that had argued that children's needs should be at the centre of childcare policy were heard in a political climate that, as illustrated in Section One, was already sympathetic to promoting children's interests/rights as a central value.

Turning now to the key proposals and observations of the Select Committee's report (Welsh Affairs Select Committee, 1999) and the corresponding response from the UK Government (Welsh Affairs Select Committee, 2000) it is possible to identify some significant divergences in how childcare is understood. The Box below illustrates attempts by the Select Committee to take forward some of the views that it had heard and to challenge aspects of the philosophy and practice of the UK Government's approach to childcare.

BOX 9: A SUMMARY OF SPECIFIC PROPOSALS PUT FORWARD BY THE WELSH AFFAIRS SELECT COMMITTEE (1999) AND THE RESPONSE OF THE UK GOVERNMENT (WELSH AFFAIRS SELECT COMMITTEE, 2000)[xxxix]

***Welsh Affairs Select Committee Proposal**

****Response of the UK Government**

Author's comments are in italics.

It is important that economic arguments do not distract us from what is best for children and that childcare is not planned in isolation from other services for children. The Strategy must be child-centred.** ***(Paragraph 4)

The Select Committee had received criticisms that the Childcare Strategy focused too much on providing childcare to meet the needs of working parents rather than taking a broader vision of the needs of children. Whilst the Select Committee did not accept this as a fair criticism it did endorse the view that the planning of childcare should take place in relation to other children's services.In Part One I showed that this focus on a child-centred approach to policy was a key concern within the National Assembly for Wales from the outset.

****'The Government agrees with providing seamless services to children. There is a strong correlation between parental employment and child outcomes. The prevalence of affordable childcare is clearly integral to child-centred policy making.'**

This response reflects the UK Government's determination to focus debates about childcare in the context of an imperative for parents to work. The original point that this is too narrow a focus has been dismissed without debate.

***It is important that parents should continue to have the choice to look after their young children themselves, if they wish. (Paragraph 6)**

The Select Committee acknowledges that the Childcare Strategy is driven by '..the wish to get parents, and mothers in particular, into work,' (Paragraph 6) but states that parental choice should also be a factor. Unfortunately there are no recommendations regarding how parents who wish to stay at home can be supported financially to do so.

****'The Government concurs with this.'**

The Government does not set out any proposals to support parental choice meaning that this will remain dependent on household income.

***Local Childcare Partnerships should begin by trying to identify, as far as is possible, the sources of informal childcare and how they can be accessed and supported. Improving the quality of informal childcare should be a priority in the Childcare Strategy. (Paragraph 7)**

This proposal in part seems to be motivated by a concern that those involved in informal childcare, whether as relatives and friends or as unregistered childminders, might need training to ensure acceptable quality. However, it does raise an interesting issue about the support needs of informal carers that could provide a space for some imaginative initiatives.

****' These are matters for the Assembly in Wales'.**

The Government shows no interest in sharing experience over this matter. If this proposal had been considered seriously it may have made it more difficult for the Government to make the negative comments about informal childcare arrangements that are implied in the response to the next proposal.

***We would support an extension of eligibility for the childcare tax credit to informal, but verifiable, childcare arrangements. (Paragraph 36)**

The Working Families Tax Credit includes a childcare tax credit to cover a percentage of eligible childcare costs and this is the main vehicle for tackling the problem of affordability. However, eligible childcare excludes informal childcare and care by family members. Hence, a substantial proportion of working parents may fail to benefit from this initiative. Given that there are insufficient formal sources of childcare to meet demand and the complex needs of many parents force them to rely on informal sources of support for some or all of the time it does seem counterproductive to ignore the contribution made by informal carers. This also contradicts the principle of extending parental choice given that many may prefer to rely on family and friends for a variety of reasons.

****'The childcare tax credit within the Working Families' Tax Credit and Disabled Person's Tax Credit aims to support the aims of the Childcare Strategy. Consequently it is important that childcare is not only verifiable but also of good quality. The Tax Credit (New Category of Childcare Provider) Regulations which came into force on 2 December 1999 establish a new category of childcare provider for the purposes of eligibility for the childcare tax credit. This category covers those providing childcare for children aged 8 and over and will come into effect from April 2000.'**

The refusal by the UK Government to accept this proposal is significant for a variety of reasons. First, this is one area where the National Assembly for Wales has no direct power to determine policy in a way that is felt to be appropriate for Welsh communities. Control of the tax and benefits system lies with the UK Parliament and this highlights the limits to devolution. Second, the unspoken implication here is that informal childcare arrangements are, by definition, of questionable quality. Third, the rejection of this proposal has particular implications for the more disadvantaged communities where market based responses to childcare needs are unlikely to be present.

***The childcare tax credit is a very welcome development, which may be of substantial benefit to many families on low and medium income, but it will not help some of the most disadvantaged families of all. (Paragraph 37)**

It does indeed seem to be paradoxical that people on the lowest income of all will not be eligible for the childcare tax credit. This includes those who are unemployed, students and those who work less than 16 hours per week. This failure to help those who are especially disadvantaged has been a key concern in the framing of this research and is something to be explored.

****'The childcare tax credit replaces the current childcare disregard in both Family Credit and Disability Working Allowance and will be a separate element in both the Working Families' Tax Credit and the Disabled Person's Tax Credit. Its rules will be based on those for the disregard but the childcare tax credit will be more visible, more generous and, as a separate credit, will ensure that those on the lower incomes can get this help'.**

This is a disappointing response. Those groups identifed by the Select Committee- the unemployed, students and those who work less than 16 hours per week- continue to be ineligible for this benefit.

The proposals of the Select Committee addressed many of the concerns raised in Chapter Three about the limitations of New Labour's vision for childcare. The potential tension between childcare for work and childcare for children, the role of parental choice, the contribution of informal care, and the link between childcare and social disadvantage are all addressed. The response of the UK Government to these proposals indicates a reluctance to engage with those issues. The Select Committee made a firm effort to 'think differently' about childcare policy and to raise issues of

relevance to Welsh communities and raised by Welsh campaigners. Their proposals suggest that key issues need further attention if childcare policy is to be linked with children's needs and a social justice agenda. The proposals appear not to be heard and this is indicative of the limits to doing things differently in Wales where policy is underpinned by taxation and welfare benefits beyond the control of the Assembly.

(b) The Wales Childcare Action Plan

Following the Welsh Affairs Select Committee Report (1999) it became the responsibility of the Assembly to take the National Childcare Strategy forward and in February 2001 Jane Hutt as Assembly Member and Minister for Health and Social Services established the National Childcare Strategy Task Force (NCSTF). The NCSTF had a brief to develop a Childcare Action Plan that would comprise practical measures to progress the Strategy. Its membership drew from a variety of childcare organisations, local Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships, key funding bodies and those involved in training and employment. A significant number of those organisations that had submitted evidence to the Select Committee were represented as members of the Task Force. With regard to issues of gender equality, membership included the Equal Opportunities Commission and Chwarae Teg but neither the Minority Ethnic Women's Network nor the Federation of Small Businesses, Wales, the only two organisations to submit evidence that supported positive action strategies to meet women's caring responsibilities, were involved.

The NCSTF presented its report in November 2001 and Jane Hutt, in her forward to the report, wrote:

> This is perhaps the first time that a report on the childcare strategy starts by considering the needs of our children. I welcome that emphasis. It represents the adoption of a 'made in Wales' approach and supports the thrust of the Assembly's other policies for children. At the same time, we continue to recognise that an effective strategy for childcare can improve the opportunities of many people to access employment and training. *Women in particular - although not exclusively – are likely to benefit in this respect. An adequate supply of good quality childcare therefore helps to meet the Assembly's economic aspirations and promotes equality of opportunity.*
> (NCSTF, 2001, 2, my emphasis)

The Assembly's claim for being distinctive in regard to its focus on children's needs is illustrated here. In addition childcare policy in Wales is claimed to meet gender equality goals and to benefit women. However, the relationship between childcare and gender equality is framed within a discourse of role equity in paid work and meeting economic needs. Childcare is seen as a means of enabling mothers to combine caring for children with paid employment and as a means of social inclusion. There is a focus on economic injustices and it is assumed that equality will be achieved at work and at home through helping women enter the labour market. This lacks an appreciation of cultural injustices and the value of a politics of recognition for work done in the home. Within this discourse care work, much of which is unpaid, done by women, and takes place in the domestic sphere, is not even considered. An agenda based on role change considerations would entail attention to strategies to encourage a redistribution of domestic labour and care work as well as expanding women's employment opportunities. In this sense childcare policy in Wales appears to be characterised by the same limitations as that found in England despite the Statutory Duty and support for gender mainstreaming.

The Assembly subsequently adopted an action plan for childcare in 2002 (WAG, 2002a) and childcare policy was firmly located within a broader framework of

children's services and policies and within a discourse of children's rights (WAG, 2004b). The EYDCPs that deliver policy at the local level were drawn into the Children and Young People's Partnerships that each local authority was required to establish by April 2003. These Partnership arrangements were described in Section One.

The emphasis on childcare as part of the children's welfare/rights agenda seems stronger than the emphasis on childcare as part of a gender equality agenda. The Assembly could have required local authorities in Wales to enter into local partnership arrangements to promote gender equality comparable to those introduced through the Framework arrangements for children and young people. This would be entirely in tune with the gender mainstreaming agenda. Yet the celebration of children's needs appears as a more potent condensation symbol than gender equality. A further concern is that although childcare in Wales is now located within a planning process concerned with children's welfare/ rights it is difficult to see how this can be delivered for all children in the context of the childcare market. Some of the organisations that gave evidence to the inquiry into childcare (Welsh Affairs Select Committee, 1999) had argued that the emphasis on childcare as part of an economic strategy might conflict with a concern for children's rights. In other words, the emphasis on childcare to support working parents may not coincide with childcare developed primarily to meet the needs of all children.

This point is further exemplified in the deliberations of the NCSTF Working Group that considered childcare to meet the needs of children, families and communities in

disadvantaged areas. This Working Group had expressed criticism of policy to meet a narrow welfare to work agenda:

> There is growing consensus that, until local communities throughout Wales develop appropriate services for children, including those that can support parents in work or training, then little impact will be made to the status quo. *The paradigm shift from the narrowly conceived welfare to work agenda to a commitment to meet the rights and needs of children, families and communities is seen as a first step.* (NCSTF, 2001: 9, para 3, my emphasis)

The Working Group envisaged that Children's Centres to be developed in each local authority area should eventually be provided *universally* and at low or no cost: 'allowing children access to play, leisure and enrichment activities, as a basic human right' (NCSTF, 2001: 15, recommendations). Sympathy for this vision was subsequently expressed in the Childcare Action Plan (WAG, 2002a) but it was noted that in a climate of limited resources it was unrealistic to expect a universal subsidy to providers of these services. Instead the Assembly noted that a key vehicle for making childcare services affordable would be the Childcare element of the Working Families Tax Credit. This illustrates how policy-makers in Wales have to embrace the welfare to work agenda, even where they are fully aware of its limitations in furthering Assembly social justice and children's rights agendas.

(c) The Childcare Strategy for Wales

These tensions remain as policy has evolved following the Childcare Action Plan (WAG, 2002a). The Welsh Assembly Cabinet Sub Committee for Children and Young People established a Childcare Working Group (CWG) in December 2003. The remit was to 'provide advice to build on and implement the Childcare Action

Plan for Wales, to promote the general provision of childcare for the benefit of children, parents and communities' (WAG, CWG, 2004: 1, para 1.1). Dr Brian Gibbons, then Deputy Minister for Economic Development and Transport chaired the CWG. Although childcare cuts across and connects many different policy arenas, according to key policy actors within the Assembly it was intended that the lead should come from an *economic* perspective and I shall provide evidence for this in Chapter Five. The membership of the CWG included representation of different kinds of Childcare provider (e.g National Childminding Association; Wales Pre-School Playgroups Association), organisations representing children's interests (e.g Children in Wales) and economic/ employment related bodies (e.g Jobcentre Plus, Wales, Welsh Development Agency). Yet with regard to gender equality matters there was no longer a representative from EOC in Wales although Chwarae Teg did secure membership. One of the particular tasks expected of the CWG was to consider reports into the economic aspects of care including the Care Scoping Study commissioned by the Assembly and undertaken by Chwarae Teg in collaboration with University of Wales, Bangor (Chwarae Teg, 2003).

The CWG produced an Interim Report in June 2004 for the purpose of consultation. This report drew together the economic and child-centred frames used to think about childcare. The main focus of the report was on economic issues with sections devoted to the Childcare Workforce, Business Support for Childcare, Childcare and the Economy. This includes reference to the need to support women's employment:

> A lack of childcare is often a barrier to women not only getting jobs, but in gaining the confidence and skills necessary to enter the labour market. The problem is particularly acute in deprived communities where self-esteem can be particularly low. (WAG, CWG, 2004: 18, Para 7.3)

Employment is understood as being the route to gender equality and tackling poverty in this diagnosis. There is a danger that linking the problem with low self-esteem places the onus on individual women to develop their confidence and thus enhance their employability. Yet, as I indicated in the previous chapters, the jobs that are available for women in this position might not be those that will enhance their self-esteem or offer a real enhancement to their life chances. In many cases women will take jobs in the low paid care sector, thus extending their unpaid caring responsibilities at home to poorly paid care responsibilities at work (Osgood, 2005; Penn, 1997). The claim also ignores the evidence that for some women it is their role in caring for their own children that gives them pleasure and self-esteem. As Lewis and Giullari put it some women may 'develop an identity and a *reputation* as a carer' (2005: 86, emphasis in original). The report thus fails to offer a thorough, respectful and considered discussion of the connections between gender, care and paid work.

The focus on economic matters sits alongside the claim in the report that childcare must be based on a children's perspective:

> There is wide agreement from all those involved in planning and delivering childcare services across Wales that the needs of children need to be set at the centre of planning, development and the delivery of childcare services. (WAG, CWG, 2004: 3, para 2)

Overall, the attention to both economic, equality and child-centred frames for childcare seems to be an attempt to satisfy the priorities of different interest groups with membership of the CWG and to further the political values discussed in Part One. However, the potential for tension between these frames is not fully worked through and, indeed, cannot be worked through where policy is driven by economic priorities and the reliance on a childcare market. This is an area that I have been able

to explore in interviews with some of the members of this CWG and discussed in the next chapter.

Following this consultation, the CWG produced its final report, *A Flying Start. Childcare for children, parents and communities*, (WAG CWG, 2005) in February 2005. Significantly, this report pursued some of the tensions and gaps in childcare policy that I have highlighted and that had been indicated in previous contributions in the evolution of policy. The following issues are raised in the report:

- The need for the Assembly to support the development of universal childcare in Wales (3, para 1);
- The value of the informal care sector and its role in compensating for gaps in formal care services deserves recognition (12-13, para 3.2);
- The Tax Credit system needs to be simplified and the '16 hour' rule that leaves parents working fewer than 16 hours a week without support needs to be reviewed;
- The childcare market based on responding to demand from working parents who are able to pay will not support the needs of all parents and children (17-18, para 4.2);
- The need for more direct public investment in childcare services (18, para 4.2);

(summarised from WAG, CWG, 2005)

These issues suggest that the CWG and those responding to the consultation were sensitive to the tension between locating childcare in a children's needs framework whilst financing it through tax credits for working parents alongside limited targeted funding for children in need. Those policy actors with an interest in children's welfare/ rights continue to press these points and to push for universal provision and public investment. However, the link between childcare and gender equality has received less attention as policy actors inside the political apparatus understand this

entirely as a role equity issue and there is no evidence that women's activists are pressing for alternative interpretations in the childcare arena.

The Childcare Strategy for Wales, *Childcare is for Children*, (WAG, 2005e) has identified three main objectives:

- To ensure that all childcare supports the developmental needs of children in Wales.
- To ensure that childcare is widely available and affordable, to enable parents to train or work and thus raise levels of economic activity in Wales.
- To provide childcare so that parents can have flexibility and choice in how they balance family, work and other commitments within their lives, and doing so promote gender equality within the workforce.

  (WAG, 2005e: 4, para 8)

Childcare is thus defined in relation to children's needs, economic strategy, parental choice, work-life balance and gender equality; a vision that appears identical to the New Labour vision discussed in Chapter Three. It is noticeable that the goal of gender equality is now confined to the *workforce* rather than more broadly.

The Strategy refers to some of the problems of sustaining childcare identified by the CWG but falls short of declaring a commitment to universal childcare. As it is beyond the capability of the Assembly to realise this goal, this is understandable. However, the Assembly has made a commitment to providing increased funding for childcare through European structural funds, through Cymorth and through a new programme called *Flying Start*. Subsequently it has published its plans for this new programme for consultation (WAG, 2005f). The aim of the programme is comparable to Sure Start with a proposal to target funding towards children aged

from birth to three years in disadvantaged areas. The funding will deliver part-time childcare for children in designated areas in order to improve child development outcomes, enable parents to access work or training and 'deliver respite for parents not in work who are having difficulty in coping with parenting' (WAG, 2005f: 2, para11). This thus remains an initiative for children living in areas of disadvantage and parents who are willing to disclose difficulties in coping. It, therefore, fits with the New Labour discourses and policies that stigmatise certain (poor, working class, lone) parents referred to in Chapter Three. It fails to recognise that *all* parents are likely to go through periods where they do not cope very well and that this cuts across social class, geographic location and other aspects of family diversity. Clearly there is a challenge in targeting limited resources towards those in greatest need in ways that do not stereotype or stigmatise.

Until recently the Assembly has mainly addressed the needs of parents in relation to childcare and other agendas concerning children and young people. In this sense it has been less vocal than New Labour in London about the needs, rights and responsibilities of parents as discussed in Chapter Three. However, the Assembly has now turned its attention to this policy arena and following consultation published its *Parenting Action Plan* (WAG, 2005g). This proposes support for parents across a range of areas including information and advice, promoting positive parenting, encouraging parental participation in service planning and ensuring services such as education work in partnership with parents. Some areas of support are of relevance to all parents (e.g local Children's Information Services) whilst others are targeted towards specific groups of parents (e.g parents with disabled children). The Action Plan 'recognises that the needs of mothers and fathers, of male and female carers, are

not always the same' (WAG, 2005g: 8, para 1.12) and refers to the Fatherhood Development Project run by Children in Wales and Fathers Direct. This Action Plan was published after my fieldwork had ended and it is too early to say how it will evolve. However, it has the potential to offer a 'policy window' (Marshall, 1997) for raising issues about unpaid care and the issues facing parents that are exemplified in Chapters Six and Seven.

CONCLUSION: CELEBRATING CHILDREN, MAINSTREAMING GENDER?

In this chapter I have discussed the evolution of childcare policy in Wales between 1999 to 2006 and connected it with certain key political values that have been celebrated by the Assembly as potent condensation symbols. These have been presented as markers of distinctiveness in the pursuit of a social policy agenda for Wales. At this point I wish to use my reading of policy texts to raise further questions about the prospects for a 'made in Wales' policy agenda [xl]and for progress towards gender equality, social justice and children's rights. These are issues to be explored in future chapters rather than concluded here.

The Assembly makes policy with its hands tied in relation to powers reserved by the UK Government such as Taxation, Benefits and Maternity/ Paternity Legislation. In this sense childcare policy in Wales can only be distinctive in limited ways. The power of dominant policy discourses to set limits to what can be imagined may also regulate how policy actors approach the issue of childcare. Despite the adoption of the statutory equality duty and support for gender mainstreaming by the Assembly,

this does not appear to be the driving force behind childcare policy. Rather childcare policy is presented as an 'investment' in children's future, as part of a package to secure children's rights and as a means to promote inclusion and social justice through ensuring both mothers and fathers are available for paid work. The claim that women, in particular, are likely to benefit from childcare policy remains untested and diversity amongst women is not addressed. If the Assembly is to take its statutory duty for equality seriously it will need to consider the accounts of ordinary mothers and fathers about how paid work, unpaid care and their attention to children's needs interact in their lives. This point will be illustrated in Chapters Six and Seven.

There is evidence that, as Welsh childcare policy has evolved, children's rights, social justice and gender equality have been a priority but they have been framed and connected with each other in relation primarily to *economic* goals. This is despite devolution and the Assembly offering a political opportunity structure that has enabled key bodies to present alternative views. In this sense the overall *substance* of policy in Wales does not appear to be distinctive even if the *style* of making policy appears to be inclusive. Nevertheless, the existence of both the Office of the Commissioner for Children in Wales and the statutory duty continue to offer 'policy windows' (Marshall, 1997) for activists seeking an alternative vision. My research tells a story that is still evolving as devolution is understood 'as a fluid and dynamic process' (McAllister, 2000, p592) rather than a one-off event.

One reason for the failure of childcare policy to connect with the gender equality agenda could be that that the concept of gender mainstreaming is problematic. The

concept is contained within a liberal discourse of equal rights within the public realm, linking with a gender-neutral model of citizenship (Lister, 1997). The focus is on working for equal opportunities in employment and in securing women's political representation. However, this does not address the disadvantages women face as a result of their particularistic needs resulting from their caring labour in the private realm. Second, there is some evidence that feminist demands have been incorporated within the state through the political apparatus of the Assembly, through Assembly Members and employees who are sympathetic to feminist concerns. However, it is likely that those working 'inside' the bureaucracy will be more successful in pressing for 'role equity' changes relating to the public realm. These are also changes that are most likely to benefit middle class, educated, professional women. It will always be more difficult to secure 'role change' demands but in relation to this case study of childcare policy at least, there was little evidence that feminists inside or outside the Welsh Assembly were pressing for those changes. Hence childcare policy needs to become a focus for political action by feminist groups outside the state apparatus and there is a need for political institutions to frame childcare as a right of citizenship, not merely as a passport to work.

In addition, the tensions between the different agendas addressed by childcare policy do not appear to have been addressed. The children's welfare/ rights agenda has proved dominant in the framing of childcare and the planning machinery introduced at the local level in Wales. Yet this cannot resolve the limits imposed by the childcare market in which ability to access services is dependent on parental income, entitlement to childcare tax credits or geographical location. Childcare policy continues to be driven by the economic priorities of the UK Government and the

welfare to work and work-life balance agendas. Market position is likely to remain the key to independence and well being within this welfare state regime with consequences for gender relations and children's welfare. It is in this context that it is possible to understand the Assembly's decision to target further resources towards areas of need rather than to pursue universal services. Nevertheless there is scope for the Assembly to take its gender mainstreaming agenda further in relation to childcare and to push policy to the limits in this regard. There is the potential to explore how children's rights and gender equality *connect* rather than to allow the celebration of children to sideline gender.

The vision for childcare in Wales is clearly limited by economic strategy although the style of policy making and the passion for 'inclusiveness' seem to suggest a difference of approach. The Statutory Duty, the commitment to gender mainstreaming and the adoption of the children's rights perspective in policy-making offer the *potential* for the Assembly to progress in new directions. While the limits are clear my reading of these policy texts suggests these 'made in Wales' initiatives could be used more imaginatively in the field of childcare. According to Mark Drakeford (2005), the Assembly has demonstrated particular strengths in seeking to develop a different style of governance and public policy making based on trust and co-operation. This will help to ensure debates around the social policy agenda remain open and vibrant and these questions of partnership between the Assembly, local government and other bodies will be pursued in the next Chapter. I turn there to the views of policy actors and the issue of policy delivery and there will be further opportunity to demonstrate the promise and the drawbacks of policy in Wales.

CHAPTER FIVE

CHILDCARE POLICY REGIMES: DISCOURSE AND DELIVERY

Introduction

In this chapter the views of policy-makers and professionals involved in the development and delivery of childcare policy and services are examined. So far the analysis of policy has focused on the discursive frames deployed in policy texts and their (dis) connections with wider ideologies such as 'sensitive/ intensive mothering' and with cultural practices shaped by 'gendered moral rationalities'. These frames comprise the 'discursive opportunity structure' which may shape the understandings and practices of members of policy arenas at both regional and local levels in Wales. Policy actors may also be tied into institutional relations of ruling within the state and may feel constrained to work within discursive frames. Nevertheless there is also the possibility that they may question those relations of ruling and ways of framing policy. All of the policy actors were able to think critically about policy, to suggest gaps and point to difficulties in implementation. This will be revealed in this chapter and is an issue to which I return in Chapter Eight. The policy actors are listed in Appendix 5.

The interviews with policy actors covered a wide variety of issues including those relating to how childcare policy is thought about and talked about and those relating to the delivery of policy and some of the challenges of making policy work in practice. The focus is thus on finding out how different policy actors thought about

childcare and related policy arenas, in the context of devolution, in relation to the *discursive opportunity structure* (Ferree, 2003) and *policy delivery*. The relationship between recognition of cultural injustices and the redistribution of economic resources is also important in my interpretation of the policy actors' positions. I shall argue that many policy actors were aware of the need to redistribute economic resources towards families in poverty focusing on achieving this through paid work opportunities. They had not fully worked through how redistribution might link with gender and with the need for the cultural recognition of the value of care work.

More specifically the analysis is organised around three key themes that were pursued with all policy actors:

- Devolution, the Assembly and "doing policy differently" in Wales;

- The framing of childcare policy in relation to the key values expressed in New Labour and Assembly texts;

- The delivery of policy, achievements and challenges.

Given the different location of regional and local policy actors in the structures of governance their views are examined separately in relation to these themes. The relationship between the regional and local levels of governance is significant for understanding the 'institutional' and 'textual' relations of ruling (Smith, 1988; 1990a; 1990b). Childcare policy, made at the national and regional levels, is delivered locally (Penn and Randall, 2005; Randall, 2004) resulting in 'extraordinary

diversity in existing patterns of provision' (Randall, 2004: 4). In this context it was essential that this research should include a case study of how one Welsh Local Authority was seeking to address childcare issues in the context of national and regional priorities.

SECTION ONE: THE REGIONAL POLICY REGIME

Reference has been made to the Assembly's commitment to a different style of politics based on inclusivity, accessibility and openness (Laffin and Thomas, 2000; Catriona Williams, 2003). According to Catriona Williams, the 'working methods of the Welsh Assembly Government have been extremely conducive to the involvement of outside bodies in the development of policies' (2003: 250), including early years provision and childcare. It was, therefore, important for this research to include regional policy actors inside and outside the Assembly who would be in a position to reflect on partnership working. Six regional policy actors were selected for interview. The sample included two actors located within the Assembly, three actors from regional public bodies that had been active in the childcare policy-making process and one actor from a public body representing children. This is evidently a small sample and I do not claim to have represented the full range of political and policy interests in this regard. However, all six actors were well placed as 'key informants' (Burgess, 1984) to provide some important insights into regional level policy agendas and all occupied senior and influential positions.

(a) Devolution, the Assembly and "doing policy differently" in Wales.

Regional policy actors were all supportive of devolution, a finding perhaps to be expected given their proximity to the Assembly as key insiders or as partners. All identified areas of significant achievement in the Assembly's agenda. According to Mike Davies (Assembly Advisor) devolution had meant that policy-makers could tailor programmes and services to local needs:

> I think that devolution does mean that you are more able to be in tune with some of the things that mean the difference to people in the way that services are provided.

He also referred to the possibility of having ' "made in Wales" solutions for problems that exist, or are more important than they would be elsewhere' (Mike Davies). This was a view that was shared by Alison Connor (Officer, Gender Equality Body 1):

> There is an awareness of the need to be Welsh in policy thinking so they *(the Assembly)* are quite good on researching what the differences are, why it is different in Wales and why UK policy may not fit the needs of people in Wales.

Policy actors also referred to the Assembly's association with a different *style* of governance as one of the markers of being distinctive. They referred to partnership and co-operation between the different public, voluntary and private bodies involved in specific policy agendas as a significant achievement:

> I think the Welsh Assembly Government are a very, very listening Government....it is a huge willingness to make changes....And there is this willingness to consider children's rights. And, of course, being Wales, it is much easier to get unity in this way....And things that come in, you can put the

> issue straight to the people who are making the resolutions. (Paul Waters, Officer, Children's Organisation)

With regard to childcare policy, for example, Mike Davies (Assembly Advisor) felt that this improved communication meant that there would be more interaction between Civil Servants and Ministers within the Assembly and the people working in the local Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships.

Regional policy actors were also generally positive about the achievements of the Assembly in relation to the policy agendas and political values identified in Chapter Four. The achievements of the Assembly with regard to children's rights and gender equality were praised. With regard to gender equality, for example, Liz Spencer (Officer, Gender Equality Body 2) was very enthusiastic about the lead provided by the Assembly:

> 110%! Absolutely fantastic! In terms of elected members, in terms of Cabinet....In terms of flagging up gender inequality...in other organisations in Wales, then, of course, the Assembly is the shining exemplar and working hard to mainstream equality in everything that it does...

Similarly, praise was raised in regard to the Assembly's stance on children's rights. Paul Waters (Officer, Children's Organisation) observed that the establishment of the Office of the Commissioner for Children 'was a very, very brave move for the Welsh Assembly Government'. He continued 'because they established an Office and have given Peter *(Clarke)* power to criticise the Government and he is completely independent in doing that'.

In summary, regional policy actors supported devolution, felt that there had been a transition towards a more open and listening form of Government and agreed that

some significant developments had been made in relation to specific policy arenas and key values. Nevertheless, some also raised particular concerns and offered reflections on the limitations to devolution. Most of the concerns related to a shared feeling that the Assembly's agenda was too ambitious to be practical and this could create problems for partners responsible for the delivery of policy. As Alison Connor put it "they are trying to juggle (*policies*), 500 things they are trying to deliver" (Alison Connor, Gender Equality Body 1). Concerns were also raised about the constraints facing the Welsh Assembly in what could be achieved in relation to a policy arena such as childcare because of the reserved powers of the UK Government in relation to taxation and the benefits system. This will be discussed in the section on policy delivery.

(b) Childcare policy frames and inclusive values

I have suggested that there are certain dominant discursive frames used to 'package' childcare policy and these may be referred to as condensation symbols (Edelman, 1964) celebrating particular political values. In Wales these political values are connected to the Assembly's commitment to 'inclusion' (Chaney and Fevre, 2001) and the interviews with regional policy actors provided an opportunity to explore this further. Different ways of framing childcare policy indicate different understandings of the purpose of childcare, who it is for and how it should be provided. The interviews explored how actors understood childcare with reference to those agendas highlighted in the analysis of policy texts:

- childcare for the economy;

- childcare for children's well being;

- childcare for social justice and inclusion;

- childcare for gender equality,

- childcare for parental support and parental choice.

These different understandings of childcare overlap considerably, connect with each other in different ways and can mean different things in different policy contexts. Furthermore, both New Labour and Assembly policy texts have sought to claim a variety of purposes, values and interests can be met within the *same* package of provision. In the interviews with regional policy actors it was childcare for the economy and childcare for children's well being that were emphasised. What was especially significant was that these two frames were generally viewed as *compatible* and *mutually supportive*. They were often linked together in terms of the social justice and inclusion agenda through a concern for tackling child poverty. The goals of childcare for gender equality and for parental support/ parental choice were subsumed within these other frames. These claims can be supported with reference to the interview data:

(i) Childcare for the economy

The dominant frame for talking about childcare among regional policy actors was in relation to the economic frame. This frame presents childcare mainly as a service for

parents in paid work and as a mechanism for stimulating economic growth and encouraging people into the labour market. The frame thus links in with dominant discourses around 'welfare to work' (Lewis, 2002) and achieving 'work-life balance' (Duncan, 2002; Glover, 2002) articulated by the UK Government. This, therefore, can be seen as a 'master narrative' (Marshall, 2000) in the regional framing of childcare. The Assembly Working Group on Childcare had been Chaired by the Deputy Minister for Economic Development and this had signalled clearly that this was the master narrative underpinning childcare at the regional level. According to key policy actors within the Assembly it was intended that the lead should come from an economic perspective:

> The Childcare Working Group that we have within the Assembly is actually chaired by Brian Gibbons who is the Deputy Minister for Economic Development. It is not an accident from the Assembly Government's point of view that the Chair of all that isn't from the Education Minister or the Health Minister or whatever but it is the Economic Development side of things that is taking the lead in doing that. (Mike Davies, Assembly Advisor)

> (the Chair of the Working Group) is an Economic Minister, so to a certain extent there is a message in that, that this is being led by an Economic Minister rather than an Education Minister or a Social Care Minister. So the economic issue is an important issue. (Keith Hall, Assembly Member)

Mike Davies explained that childcare was seen as essential from an economic perspective for a variety of reasons. First of all, there was an interest in childcare through the Assembly's responsibility to support small businesses and to encourage more people to enter the childcare market in this regard. Second, ensuring the availability of childcare was viewed as a means of tackling recruitment problems in areas of labour shortage:

> Wales is as close to full employment as we have been for 30 or more years. One of the effects of that is that employers may have to take a little more of an interest in the things that make it possible for the people who they would like

> to take up the jobs on offer to be able to take those jobs up. (Mike Davies, Assembly Advisor)

Childcare was also linked with economic priorities through the 'welfare to work' agenda and this seemed to be a particular concern for those actors located within the Assembly. Policy actors linked to the Assembly stressed particularly high levels of economic inactivity in Wales. Mike Davies and Keith Hall both argued that Wales faced a more significant problem of economic inactivity than other parts of the UK and explained that improved childcare provision had been identified as one way of tackling this. Economic inactivity is thus distinguished from unemployment to signal that the problem is seen in terms of the ability and willingness of those not currently working to take the paid jobs that are available. There was a need to:

> Bring more people back into thinking that work is something that would be good for them and they would want to do and so on. Often these are people who are out of the workplace for health related reasons but as well there are people who are not looking for work because they have family obligations including childcare. (Mike Davies)

> I think as well in Wales, from an economic point of view, although I don't think we have cracked unemployment, we have got as close to cracking unemployment as we are likely to get if we continue the present trajectory. But the area we haven't really cracked is economic inactivity so we thought childcare is an integral part of dealing with the economic inactivity.(Keith Hall)

This shift of attention from *unemployment* (viewed to no longer be a real problem) to *economic inactivity* (used to describe a situation in which it is felt more people who are currently not undertaking paid work must be persuaded to do so) reveals a discursive sleight of hand. The construction of 'family obligations' as a barrier to paid work rather than an area of valued activity in its own right echoes directly the narrow framing of childcare in New Labour and Assembly policy texts. Furthermore, Mike Davies believed there was the potential for those who were economically

inactive as a consequence of unpaid caring duties to be persuaded to convert their skills into something of value in the labour market:

> One of the things that I think that we have to do is to persuade people in that position is that actually the things that they have been doing when they have not been formally working give them skills and experiences and are very directly relevant to what the marketplace needs. Most often they seem to me to be in the caring type areas.

And he continued:

> So, from an economic development perspective, the interest in childcare is both because we need it in order to persuade people who are economically inactive to become active, but also because I think those people represent an untapped pool of talent that means some of those people will be able to become the providers of childcare. (Mike Davies)

This is far removed from the vision of an 'ethics of care' (F.Williams, 2001) in which care within the domestic realm is valued in its own right, thus meeting claims for cultural recognition. Those who provide the bulk of unpaid care are merely to be encouraged into a social care sector characterised by gender inequalities and low pay (Osgood, 2005). There is little evidence here that childcare policy has been examined through the lens of gender mainstreaming despite the involvement of actors from gender equality organisations in the regional policy process and partner networks.

Beyond the Assembly the other regional policy actors also stressed childcare in relation to an economic frame. Liz Spencer (Gender Equality Body 2) linked childcare to both an economic frame and gender equality frame, taking the view that these were intrinsically linked. Her organisation had been closely involved in the making of childcare policy at various stages and she commented 'we were pleased to see a section of that first Childcare Strategy document that dealt with childcare and

the economy or childcare and employment' (Liz Spencer). Similarly, Alison Connor, working for a different regional equality body, explained 'we have been working with Jane Hutt and Jane Davidson to engage childcare as an economic productivity issue as much as an equality and fairness issue' (Alison Connor). Lesley Thomas (Officer, Regional Public Body) also approached childcare from an economic frame by seeing it as a personnel and trade union matter of potential benefit to public service employees as she said: 'It is just part of the HR agenda really. Around recruitment and retention, flexible working, improvement to services, all those kinds of issues. And equalities as well' (Lesley Thomas). These interviews thus confirm that regional policy actors from gender equality bodies working in partnership with the Assembly were mainly utilising role equity discourses in their contributions to policy development. Yet this did not really engage with the issue of the lack of cultural recognition for unpaid care or the need for a redistribution of resources to support those who do the care. The role equity discourse may also be in tension with 'gendered moral rationalities' that do value care. As Fiona Beveridge and her colleagues have argued, many gender equality initiatives are lacking in that 'they identify the problem of women's inequality as a labour market problem and measure progress in terms of such factors as women's labour force participation' (2000: 385). It would seem that the understanding of gender mainstreaming at the regional level in Wales demonstrates their claim forcefully.

(ii) Childcare for Children's Well Being/ Childcare for Social Justice and Inclusion

> Interesting that the response from most childcare organisations and, indeed, all the other partner agencies, is please, please, please, on this agenda make

> sure that what we are talking about first and foremost is children's and families' rights but especially children's rights and the rights of young people under the UN Convention. (Liz Spencer, Gender Equality Body 2)

The role of childcare in relation to children's well being and in relation to social justice and inclusion issues has been identified as involving separate but interrelated strands of policy. In practice regional policy actors appeared to conflate these different strands, often through focusing on the perceived role of childcare in tackling poverty both now and for future generations. Childcare and early years education were viewed as a form of early intervention that would help address a wide variety of social problems later. In this sense the celebration of children is effectively harnessed to the economic agenda. The symbolic placing of the child at the centre of policy is utilised to draw support for measures that have other objectives. Mike Davies, for example, was candid in explaining that at times presenting a policy as a "children's needs" issue in terms of education or child poverty could make it more attractive to partners. He provided an example in relation to the Assembly's commitment to provide breakfast clubs in schools (Welsh Assembly Government, 2004b); an initiative also being introduced elsewhere in the UK (Shemilt *et al*, 2003):

> Free breakfasts in primary schools is essentially an anti-poverty and educational policy. I think there is a bit of fear here that if we talk up the childcare side of it too much then it could cause difficulties with the Teacher Unions and other people that we are having to persuade to come along and help us with this policy. (Mike Davies, Assembly Advisor)

Some views chimed with the notion of investing in the children for the future (Lister, 2003) and tackling a variety of social problems believed to be associated with exclusion:

> If you have got a situation in which the parents are working, children are having quality childcare that they are benefiting from, then their academic

> achievement will improve, their role as young citizens will improve, hopefully antisocial behaviour will decline so there should be a community benefit as well. The line we are using is childcare for children, parents and communities. So we want to make sure children, parents and communities all benefit from it. (Keith Hall, Assembly Member)

> And childcare is an important part of what many Communities First partnerships have concentrated on. They do it for a lot of these reasons ...because it helps people become economically active, because in a Sure Start sense it provides a set of socialising experiences. (Mike Davies, Assembly Advisor)

The discursive frames propounded by the New Labour Government that simultaneously claim childcare as a benefit for all whilst targeting those labelled as social problems are thus echoed by insiders within the Assembly. The notion of childcare as a *universal right* for all children is thus sidelined despite the children's rights agenda claimed as a marker of distinctiveness in Wales. In addition the well-known limitations of area based anti-poverty/ social inclusion programmes need to be signalled more clearly, for, as Gordon Jack puts it:

> ....appropriately designed community programmes should be able to achieve some improvements in children's lives but (that), on their own, they are unlikely to be able to combat the stronger influences of structural inequalities and individual characteristics. Furthermore, it is important to realize that most disadvantaged *individuals* do not actually live in disadvantaged *areas*... (2005: 295)

Alison Connor (Gender Equality Body 1) proposed an alternative understanding of the connections between childcare, the economy and an anti-poverty agenda. She recognised that tackling childhood poverty raised issues of *gender* also. In her view the economic case for childcare is linked to both gender equality and anti- poverty issues and she argued:

> ..childcare provision is absolutely the critical key to moving children and women out of poverty....children enter poverty because of their mothers, there is definitely a gendered link to child poverty and if we want to tackle that you need to tackle the values...economic activity is the best route out of poverty to independence for women.

This was an example that some regional policy actors were seeking to ensure gender issues were not sidelined. However, this is a view that may fit uneasily with certain 'gendered moral rationalities' that place mothers at home with their children, an issue to be explored later. Here this policy actor appears to be taking for granted that the welfare state regime is moving towards a dual adult earner model and that this is to be encouraged in the interests of women and gender equality. Yet comparative work on welfare state regimes and the gender order can offer alternatives, such as payments for carers, that equality bodies could consider. Cultural recognition for the massive economic and social contribution made by those who care could lead to a fairer distribution of economic resources so that this contribution is rewarded.

In order to embrace the economic frame and the child-centred frame Assembly Ministers and Advisors try to bring the two together through its child poverty strategy. The problem is that this will mean that the needs and rights of many children living outside areas of deprivation or living in households that do not meet the criteria for Tax Credit support will go unmet. Indeed, the Cymorth fund for supporting children and young people reflects this tension between declaring universal rights for children whilst targeting limited funding only to certain geographical areas or communities of need.

At the same time the use of a child poverty/ disadvantage frame offers the benefit that all actors claim to agree with it and believe that childcare has a crucial role to

play in progressing the interests of children. It therefore seems to have significant symbolic power (Edelman, 1977) in drawing together actors in different locations in the spheres of politics, gender equality, children's rights and public services. Whether they frame childcare in terms of the economy, justice/ inclusion or children's rights, the claim that childcare can help to tackle child poverty has something to offer them.

(iii) Childcare to support gender equality.

The analysis has illustrated that the *regional* policy actors tended to draw mainly on the economic and children's needs/ social inclusion frames in discussing childcare. Concerns with gender equality appeared subservient to the economic frame meaning that full attention to the interaction between gender, care and work was lacking. Regional policy actors were asked to comment on how childcare could connect with the Assembly's gender mainstreaming agenda. Alison Connor (Equality Body 1) argued that gender mainstreaming hadn't happened in the childcare policy arena. When asked if the gender equality agenda was integrated with childcare policy, she replied:

> No, I don't think they are, I don't think they are and I think there is a general lack of awareness of the issues between the two and there is a general lack of understanding of child poverty and the gendered nature of child poverty....I think the lack of understanding of how those things interconnect has seriously damaged policy.

Whilst those with gender expertise raised some concerns, it was evident that some of the insiders to the Assembly were not confident in discussing the issue of gender equality. Keith Hall, for example, claimed that the issue was dealt with by the fact

that the membership of the Childcare Working Group was predominantly made up of women, some of whom had a 'track record' in this area:

> So the equal opps people, the fact that they are not, you know, to a certain extent, *I think we just take it as read*, it is not an issue of contention, really. And I'd say, it does not guarantee anything but two thirds of the group are women, if not more, so I mean, many have a long track record on equal opps activity. So people who are involved on the Committee have probably spent their political life dealing with gender issues and equal opportunities issues... (my emphasis)

However, Chwarae Teg was the only organisation represented on the Childcare Working Group that has a specific brief to address gender equality and its focus is on economic development. The track record referred to here does not appear to have helped generate a focus on how gender, care and paid work connect, rather it has been *taken for granted* that women will benefit from an expanded childcare market.

Alison Connor (Equality Body 1), Liz Spencer (Equality Body 2) and Lesley Thomas (Public Service Body) all had particular expertise in the field of gender equality. Yet these regional policy actors consider equality primarily in relation to an economic frame and publicity and policy texts produced by their organisations utilise a discourse that focuses on the business case for childcare and issues of work-life balance. This is a limited view of the connections between childcare and gender equality and ties in with the emphases of New Labour and Assembly policy texts. In this sense it is possible to identify how dominant textual discourses regulate and set limits to social action and tie social action in different localities to the economic apparatus (Smith, 1990b). Those partners that achieve access to regional policy-making are those that support favoured discourses and are able to use them effectively to further their particular interests (Ball and Charles, 2006).

With regard to the two policy actors from the Assembly, neither had spontaneously used a gender equality frame when talking about childcare and so were questioned directly about this. Mike Davies shifted the discussion immediately to equality in general:

> ..one of the ways in which I think this Assembly Government tries to think about, talk about, equality is that we want to move on from simply talking about equality of opportunity and to talk about equality of outcome...
>
> It is about trying to say that over time we narrow down some of the inequalities that exist in our society and give a sense of cohesion.

Keith Hall interpreted the link in terms of removing barriers to paid work for all:

> We will take the view that certainly everybody who wants to be able to partake in the labour market should have all the obstacles that can affect that removed from them. So, I think we are coming at it from that way. I mean obviously the Assembly is completely signed up for the equal opportunities agenda.

In this sense gender was viewed as one of a range of possible factors leading to inequality and it could be argued that the Statutory Duty encourages this broad perspective. However, there was little indication that gender mainstreaming had captured the imagination of either policy actor. The strong commitment of the Assembly to promoting equality was taken for granted and as something to be welcomed. Those policy actors without a specialist interest in gender equality are able to celebrate it as another marker of 'inclusion' but are less confident about how this is worked through in specific policy arenas. Kim Hoque and Mike Noon have considered claims that equal opportunities policies can sometimes be merely 'empty shells' and 'exercises in image management' (2004: 482). Put another way, Simon Duncan has argued that gender mainstreaming can be rhetorical and can result in

gender policies that are ' 'broad and shallow' rather than 'narrow and deep'' (2002: 312). My analysis of the making of childcare policy in Wales lends some support to these fears.

(c) ***The delivery of policy at regional level, achievements and challenges.***

Regional policy actors were invited to comment on the challenges of making childcare policy work in practice. Their responses focused on two areas: first, the limits imposed by the nature of devolution in Wales; secondly, some of the specific features of the social and economic landscape in Wales.

(i) The limits of devolution.

Those actors inside the Assembly suggested that there was a difference of interpretation between the Assembly and the UK Government over the meaning of social inclusion and how the anti-poverty agenda could be progressed. This in turn had implications for childcare policy:

> one of the problems is that we haven't got much say over Childcare Tax Credits, Working Tax Credits because that is a UK matter anyway....we can say what we think in terms of how well it is working in a Welsh context but...we can't say we won't do nothing until Gordon Brown decides to change it. (Keith Hall).

Similarly, Mike Davies commented on the limits to using Tax Credits as the main mechanism for enabling parents to access childcare but pointed out that this was beyond the control of the Assembly:

> The Assembly's ability to do things directly there is limited. We do not handle tax and social security and all those sorts of things so it hasn't been possible to influence, we don't have the responsibility, the power to make a difference there.

These limits to devolution are highly significant with regard to childcare especially as far as meeting the needs and preferences of parents are concerned. Direct support for the costs of childcare comes through the Tax Credit system and this is not a devolved area. In turn this has implications for the availability of childcare in different neighbourhoods because UK strategy has been to let the childcare market respond to local demand from parents (Lewis, 2003). This was an issue that Keith Hall suggested was a possible area for contention:

> Gordon Brown is of the view that we stimulate the market by providing Tax Credits and that will bring people in to the market to meet the needs. Whereas I suppose the more traditional command and control, old labour socialist view would be that we build something...So the balance between the supply side and the demand side is a bit of an issue.

The differences of vision between 'old' labour and 'new' labour is thus expressed here.

(ii) The distinctive nature of the Welsh socio-economic landscape.

The ability of the Assembly to tailor childcare policy to the needs of Welsh communities is heavily circumscribed especially given high poverty levels, low paid work and poor transport in rural areas. All of these factors will set limits to childcare provision that develops through market demand. As Keith Hall acknowledged:

> The level of low income, social and economic deprivation. We don't have the extremes of London, and a few other places but I think per head of population we have got a much greater and I think as well, probably

> geographical spread, in terms of people living in valley communities and so forth, does present a set of challenges that don't exist in England.

Hence, it is exactly those aspects of the social and geographical landscape that distinguish Wales, that require 'made in Wales' policy solutions that are not within the powers of the Assembly to redress. Whilst this may be a layer of Government committed to a discourse of redistribution rather than merely social integration (Levitas, 1998), this is precisely what it cannot achieve. There may be more scope for pursuing 'made in Wales' solutions to cultural injustices than those relating to economic injustices. Whilst the Assembly can ensure, for example, that there is cultural recognition for Welsh medium playgroups and for ensuring the early years curriculum recognises the Welsh language, it will be more difficult for it to address entrenched gender and class inequalities that require massive economic redistribution. Yet given the connection I have emphasised between cultural recognition and economic redistribution, even policies based on giving cultural recognition will be constrained in the absence of resources.

SECTION TWO: THE LOCAL POLICY REGIME

In this Section I move on to consider the views of the *local* policy actors in relation to the same three themes that I addressed in Section One. However, before I do this I will provide an account of how the local authority level relates to childcare policy planning and provide some description of the arrangements in Swansea. The relationship of childcare to gender politics and the impact of the Assembly's commitment to gender mainstreaming on local policy-making were also central concerns as my attention moved to the local level. Vicky Randall has used the notion

of the child daycare regime to refer to 'the way daycare has been institutionalised, or 'framed', in local authority policy, in terms both of its organisation and activity and of its governing discourses' (2004: 4). This is a notion that enables attention to the impact of gender politics on the making of local childcare policy, an issue that is also pursued by Randall in her research into local authorities in England. The City and County of Swansea was selected as the 'local child daycare regime' (Randall, 2004) for my exploration of the local delivery of childcare policy.

In Chapter One I argued that the state should be viewed as a site of struggle, as complex and contradictory and that the local state deserved specific attention in its role in the delivery of welfare policy and within the 'relations of ruling' (Smith, 1988). Turning to the three key structures that compose the 'gender regime' (Connell, 1990, see Box 1), it can be argued that the local level of governance has its own specificity. The division of labour, the structures of bureaucratic power and the structure of cathexis (emotional attachments) will vary across localities in the degree to which they are gendered. In Pfau-Effinger's (1998) terms, the *gender culture* and *gender order* will have a local dimension resulting in different *gender arrangements*.

Under New Labour's programme for the modernization of local government there has emerged a vision of local authorities as community leaders in encouraging greater partnership between agencies and community involvement in service delivery (Brooks, 2000; DiGaetano, 2001; DETR, 1998). The Local Government Act 2000 placed a duty on all local authorities in England and Wales 'to promote or improve the social, economic and environmental well being of their area' (WAG, 2002h: 11). Each authority was expected to prepare a community strategy to pursue this duty in

partnership with the public, private, voluntary and community sectors and local people. In Wales, Community Strategic Partnerships have been established to draw up and implement the community strategy and these are viewed by the Welsh Assembly Government as 'the key overarching partnership for each local authority area' (WAG, 2002h: 11). In this way it is possible to identify a vision for local authorities within the New Labour agenda as 'community leaders' within planning processes but also as partners who share rather than own the local strategies.

The focus on partnership working between local government, the business and voluntary sectors and local communities is also evident in the regeneration initiatives introduced by New Labour (Carley, 2000), many of which tie in with childcare policy. The Welsh Assembly Government's agenda for tackling poverty and social disadvantage includes various area-based regeneration initiatives such as the *Communities First* programme (NAfW, 2001a; WAG, 2002h) and the *Cymorth* programme. Whilst these programmes are 'made in Wales', they embrace New Labour modernization and social inclusion projects, including co-operation between statutory and voluntary agencies and the involvement of local communities in identifying priorities for social action (Welsh Assembly Government, 2002h).

Within the new local governance, partnership, inter-agency collaboration and 'welfare pluralism' in service delivery (Taylor, 2000) cut across specific policy arenas, including childcare. The idea of 'joined up government' has become a recognisable catch phrase that may obscure some important tensions. However, with welfare restructuring there has been a trend towards seeking the integration of economic and social policies at the level of local governance (Valler and Betteley,

2001). The ideology underpinning the shift from welfare to workfare is that economic competitiveness, equality and social inclusion can go hand in hand. As Taylor-Gooby says, the new welfare 'can only justify social spending as investment in human capital and the enhancement of individual opportunities' (Taylor-Gooby, 1997: 171). The analysis of policy texts and interviews with regional policy actors has indicated that the Welsh Assembly Government has embraced this ideology in their agenda for childcare. While there are tensions between childcare for the economy and childcare for children's needs, equality and social justice, these are obscured. However, these are real conflicts of interest and they are likely to be played out at the local level, because this is where policy is delivered. This local case study of Swansea as a child daycare regime takes the opportunity to explore how the tensions evident in childcare policy *discourse* are played out in policy *delivery* and with regard to those partnerships with specific responsibility for this policy arena.

In Chapter Four I described the main delivery mechanisms and funding streams for childcare in Wales. My research took place in the period following the Assembly's adoption of the *Childcare Action Plan* in 2002 (WAG, 2002a). Since my fieldwork was completed it is likely that there have been further changes at the local level to accommodate new Assembly guidance. The arrangements described here were current at the time of the fieldwork.

The Swansea Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership (EYDCP) had been in operation since 1999 supported by a co-ordinator with responsibility for Early Years Development and Childcare and for Sure Start. In September 2002,

when the new Children and Young People Framework Partnership was introduced the EYDCP became a sub-group. The arrangement is illustrated below.

DIAGRAM 2: CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE PARTNERSHIP ARRANGEMENTS IN SWANSEA.

Children and Young People (Framework) Partnership
Supported by Children and Young People Support Unit

This is the overarching Partnership and sets the parameters within which the lower-tier Partnerships operate. The Support Unit officers work in co-operation with all the Partnerships represented here.

Children Partnership, 0 to 10 years Reports to Framework Partnership	Young People Partnership, 11 to 25 years Reports to Framework Partnership

Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership

This is a sub-group of the Children Partnership.

There is a Children and Young People Support Unit located in the Education Department and led by the Children and Young People Multi-Agency Manager. The Children Partnership (established Spring 2003) and Young People Partnership (established Summer 2003) each have a co-ordinator. The EYDCP also has a Development Officer. A representative from the voluntary sector chairs the EYDCP. It has a broad membership drawn from the statutory, voluntary and private sectors. At the time of my fieldwork there was no direct representation from either parents or children. When the Children Partnership was established it built on the membership

of the existing EYDCP and Sure Start Partnerships. Further information about the functional role of the EYDCP is provided later in this chapter.

I will now turn to the interview data and the three themes that have been discussed in relation to the regional policy actors. I interviewed eight local policy actors and their details are provided in Appendix 5. My understanding of local policy delivery was also enhanced through meetings with local practitioners working either across the City or in one or more of the three areas selected for the neighbourhood case studies.

(a) Devolution, the Assembly and "doing policy differently" in Wales.

The Assembly had established three Partnership Councils, for the voluntary sector, local government and business, to support greater partnership and participation (Catriona Williams, 2003). Many local policy actors were in agreement with opinions expressed at regional level and formalised in these structures concerning the willingness of the Assembly to consult, to engage in partnership with other agencies and to listen to different viewpoints:

> ....there are closer discussions about issues like childcare and closer engagement in the development of policies than there were when it was just the Welsh Office. So, to that extent I think the sector....feel that the policies that are delivered have been through some sort of consultation process.
>
> I think the Assembly has created a shift of more about a culture of discussing with people what the policies should be before they are implemented. (Sarah Wilson, Voluntary Sector/ EYDCP)

However, many local policy actors expressed the view that the Assembly's energetic style of operation was difficult to handle at the local level where commitments had to be delivered:

> I don't have a problem with what the Assembly is trying to do but they are trying to do too much, too quickly and it is not joined up, in my opinion. (Nicholas Peters, Senior Officer/ Local Authority)

> I think they have done some things too fast for a quick fix……and I think it is trying to mean everything to everybody. (Rita Daniels, Officer/ Local Authority/ EYDCP)

Some policy actors felt that the Assembly issued conflicting guidance in areas such as childcare that cut across the responsibilities of different departments. Many local policy actors suggested that there was a failure to 'join up' policy and that guidance would not fit together. As Nicholas Peters explained:

> ..what the Assembly is trying to do is right….it isn't joined up enough. So we have to try to join it up here which is very difficult so we just end up sending plans to the Assembly all the time.

Other concerns related to the perception that the Assembly did not always provide resources to match its ambitious agenda and that at the local level people were already over-stretched:

> The other thing about the Assembly is how much we get resources to do these things because unless we get more resources, people are pretty committed, often over committed and as well as deciding to fund a new service you have to spend time working out what that might be. (Chris Coleman, Senior Officer/ Local Authority)

In addition some respondents felt that staff within the Assembly did not always have a firm understanding of some of the strategies and principles that were being

encouraged. Chris Coleman felt that the principle of planning services for children and young people through partnerships was an example of this:

> The other bit of the muddle is that they are mixing up the planning that you do when you have clear targets and resources and the planning that you have to do when you don't have resources and you are co-ordinating agencies which do and have their own lines of accountability.

Some of these issues will be considered at more length in the section on policy delivery. Here my main concern has been to demonstrate that all the local policy actors were generally supportive of devolution and were convinced of the commitment of the Assembly to the policy arenas addressed in this research. However, as the partners responsible for the delivery of the Assembly's agendas at the local level they held reservations about how these could be realised in practice.

(b) Childcare policy frames and inclusive values

Local policy actors, in contrast to those at regional level, tended not to package childcare mainly as an economic issue, although some were supportive of the welfare-to-work agenda. The *children's needs* frame combined with the *anti-poverty frame* became the master narratives now. Overwhelmingly childcare was referred to in the context of helping to support parents and children, especially those living in difficult social conditions:

> We know how hard it is to identify someone to offer childcare. So we tend to say, well we will sort that out, bring them with you. And, obviously, as well, whether it is (local Family Centre) or our own creche there is a lot of stimulation that goes on in that childcare, which their child might miss out on if they are with other people. (Erica Bell, Sure Start Officer)

> I think there should be creative opportunities for parents. In the fully Integrated Centre we can access, you can have the course for you, maybe something to prepare you, or maybe offer you the opportunity to do Playwork, to get accreditation...You have got one child in nursery, you have got the other child in childcare or creche, while you can access that. And it is about self-esteem for parents. (Rita Daniels, Officer/ Local Authority/ EYDCP)

Local policy actors seemed more likely to point to potential tensions in policy agendas than those at regional level. This is perhaps to be expected giving the broad gap between those who "make policy" and those who have to "make policy work". The emphasis on meeting the needs of families, especially those living in poverty, also led to a different understanding of the links between childcare and *gender* issues. I have argued that the regional policy actors mainly connected gender and childcare in terms of providing equal opportunities to access paid work. The local policy actors understood childcare policy as providing support for (vulnerable) mothers and their children. This also incorporated recognition that women in minority ethnic communities might have particular needs for support:

> The first report we did was research into why (minority ethnic) women weren't accessing the key sections of social services, health. That was very eye-opening evidence... (Debra Mason, Officer/ Local Authority/ EYCDP)

Narinder Begum (Sure Start) raised the issue of the isolation of many minority ethnic women:

> With the women because they are at home with the children, they don't have the external environment for them to learn English or how to pay bills or fill in forms.

Many of the local policy actors involved with Swansea EYDCP and Sure Start Partnerships talked about the relationship between parenting and childcare in terms of some of the difficulties facing mothers and fathers. The traditional division of

labour between mothers and fathers was generally taken for granted but this did mean that some recognised the stresses that mothers confined to the home or seeking to balance too many responsibilities could face. There was an appreciation that childcare did not provide an automatic route to equality for women and that, where women do work, this can be a double burden and a source of guilt:

> I think childcare can only assist women with a career but equally...I think it is one in five children is raised without a Dad and here the woman has to be in a high enough job to be able to access childcare. But more and more women are, I suppose, career-minded and I think they are caught in the middle, really. They would like to stay at home to care for their children but equally they have got all the other areas... (Debra Mason, Local Authority/ EYDCP)

> Well, I suppose in as much as women can go out to work but for a number of reasons they are probably still limited to part-time sort of jobs....women still predominantly take over responsibility for childcare, whether they are doing themselves or organising it and also a lot of domestic...sometimes organising the childcare as well as going out to work as well as doing all the domestic, sometimes it is just one more burden. (Sarah Wilson, Voluntary Sector/ EYDCP)

It is this understanding of how women, especially those with access only to low paid employment, may experience the pressures to combine work with childcare that seemed to be missing at regional level and this ties in with the strategic and operational split in policy-making. It also relates to professional and social class differences between women. Regional policy actors, although claiming to act on behalf of all women, seemed to be articulating a role equity discourse that may speak more to the interests of middle class, professional women. In contrast, local policy actors, focusing their work on women and children living in poverty and low income households seemed to recognise this discourse may not seem to be relevant to their circumstances. There was also some recognition that there was a need to consider the role of men. The Swansea Sure Start Partnership had appointed a Dads Worker in

recognition that many fathers were reluctant to attend parenting classes and Sure Start workers stressed there was a need to expand this work due to huge demand from fathers.

Whilst some local policy actors did refer to the gendered nature of care in their responses, there was no evidence that this was in the context of a strong gender equality policy or commitment to further the Assembly's mainstreaming agenda at the local level through the Partnership arrangements. As one member of the EYDCP observed, attention to gender equality 'hasn't been a role that it (*EYDCP*) has taken on and I'm not sure I could see it doing so in the near future' (Sarah Wilson). This finding is echoed in Vicky Randall's research in six English local authorities, leading her to conclude that 'Where gender politics is concerned, even in the politics and discourse of the most generous daycare providers, avowedly feminist concerns and formulations have been muted in their expression' (2004: 17). Although the Assembly has placed gender equality as a key political value on the map in Wales, it cannot be assumed that this has encouraged a shift at the local level of governance where social justice interests focus on issues of social class and deprivation.

Some of the differences between regional and local policy actors in the framing of childcare have been highlighted. This is really a difference of emphasis and alternative selections from the various frames that are available rather than evidence of conflicting priorities. As I have suggested these differences seem to be a result of where actors are placed in the system of governance and policy-making with a broad distinction between childcare for economic development/ regeneration (regional level) and childcare for children/family needs (local level) as the master narratives. I

have emphasised that childcare policy tries to reconcile competing interests in a single package in which economic priorities dominate. This means that inevitably there will be challenges in policy delivery.

(c) Childcare policy delivery in the City and County of Swansea

I will now turn to the perspectives of local policy actors on the challenges of making childcare policy work. I will address the themes of partnership, user participation/ involvement, information services and sustainability.

(i) Perspectives on partnership

Local policy actors were invited to talk about partnership in relation to the new Children and Young People Framework Partnership arrangements and the EYDCP. These will be considered in turn.

The Swansea Children and Young People Framework Partnership

Local policy actors were generally in favour of the principle of partnership in service delivery for children and young people. Some felt that there had been some success in encouraging partners to engage in setting priorities for service delivery, so that current plans were based on a democratic process. However, they also pointed to some challenges in ensuring the Partnerships worked effectively. One policy actor felt that there was a problem of partnership 'overload':

> The idea is good and I think probably is the right idea. The thinking through of that in the Assembly has been very poor and when I talk to headteachers, when I talk to the voluntary sector, particularly headteachers, they say "not another bloody partnership", I mean there are so many partnerships. We are actually in the situation now of setting up partnerships for partnerships in a way. (Chris Coleman, Senior Officer/ Local Authority)

Some of the challenges, therefore, related to the expectations imposed by the Assembly. Policy actors pointed out that Assembly Guidance was not always coherent because it came from different Divisions at the same time. The demands of making the Guidance work in practice and in co-ordinating work across the different partnerships was very time consuming:

> I was surprised at how long it has taken but it has taken 2 years to get to the stage where we are getting to be clear about 15 things to do...so it has taken a long time to do that and actually tuning up the partnership and getting the membership and all that and keeping tabs on that. (Chris Coleman)

Policy actors also explained that the different Partnerships were at varying stages of development. The Children and Young People Framework Partnership was new with a strategic role and with a membership drawn from a senior level in partner agencies. There had previously been a Children's Partnership managed by the Social Services Department and a Young People's Partnership managed by the Education Department. These were described as Partnerships that had both a strategic and an operational role. In addition the EYDCP had been operating prior to the new arrangements. With the new requirement to establish a Framework Partnership, Officers were faced with the challenge of co-ordinating Partnerships with different roles, different memberships and linked to different Departments within the City and County of Swansea:

> And over a period of time they have begun to gel together but obviously you have got the Children one working from a basis of good work over a period of time, the Young People one, very shaky, and then the Framework Partnership, new.....So you have come from a history where the Children's Partnership has worked well, and the Early Years, but the other two haven't had that. (Nicholas Peters, Senior Officer)

As a consequence of the evolution of these arrangements the co-ordinators that had been appointed to manage the different partnerships were located in different Local Authority Departments. The Co-ordinator of the Children and Young People Support Unit was located in the Education Department, the Youth Partnership Co-ordinator was based in the Regeneration Department and the Children's Partnership Co-ordinator was in the Social Services Department. As one Senior Officer commented:

> ..so they have different line management arrangements, which is not a good thing...I mean if you are over somebody and you discuss something and then say, now go and do it, they do it, but if their boss is somebody else, they then have to go to their boss, it is not quite the same. So we don't have a unified approach from the Assembly and we don't have a unified approach in the Authority. (Chris Coleman)

In these circumstances policy actors were candid in admitting that there was more work to be done in making the new arrangements work effectively and in ensuring there was coherence in planning. They also suggested that the role of the Framework Partnership was not necessarily well understood in agencies beyond the Local Authority meaning that commitment to it still needed to be fostered:

> ...people are not attending meetings. They don't see the significance of the Framework Partnership so they are sending somebody else. The whole idea of the Framework Partnership is to have people there who can make decisions. Who have control over the budgets and things like that (.....) It is about making it clearer. Getting some clarity about what we want, what we want to achieve, what Partnerships are for and who should attend them. And then making sure that happens. (Nicholas Peters, Senior Officer)

It is not the purpose of this research to evaluate the effectiveness of these Partnership arrangements that were still evolving during my fieldwork. Nevertheless it was clear that Officers were facing significant demands in making the new structures for delivery work in practice. However, in the case of the EYDCP, this was a partnership that pre-dated the new arrangements.

Swansea Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership

This Partnership became a sub-group of the Children Partnership under the new arrangements but had been meeting for several years before this. EYDCPs play an important role across the United Kingdom in ensuring the National Childcare Strategy is delivered at the local level (Penn and Randall, 2005;Tanner *et al*, 2006) and they have statutory responsibility for preparing an early years development plan and a childcare plan for their area. Following Assembly guidance (WAG, 2003b) Local Education Authorities in Wales were allowed to choose between the option of allowing their new Children's Partnership to function also as the EYDCP or to set up the EYDCP as a sub-group of the Children's Partnership. Hence in some Welsh Local Authorities the EYDCP has been absorbed into the Children Partnership but in others, including Swansea, it had been decided that it should be able to retain its own identity in order to ensure a high profile for early years education and childcare issues. The EYDCP has acted as a forum for information sharing and joint planning in areas such as training childcare workers, submissions for funding and grant allocation. More specifically the EYDCP:

- Brings together providers from the public, private and voluntary sector to work in partnership to maximise existing services.

- Offers training opportunities for all childcare providers.
- Offers advice and support to providers, parents, employers, other agencies and people interested in working in the field of childcare.
- Offers funding opportunities and advice to all Providers and prospective providers.
- Produces regular Newsletters keeping providers updated on all the latest developments and opportunities.
- Is responsible for new developments such as promoting registered childminding and the Children's Information Service.

(City and County of Swansea EYDCP Publicity leaflet, undated)

EYDCPs have a duty to prepare an Early Years Development and Childcare Plan. However, with the introduction of Cymorth, the Children and Youth Support Fund, EYDCPs are now required to plan and deliver the *childcare* element of the Plan within their Local Cymorth plan. They also continued to have a duty to prepare and publish the *early years* element of the Early years Development and Childcare plan according to existing guidance (WAG, 2003b). The Cymorth programme targets disadvantaged communities defined either in terms of geographic areas or as non-geographic communities of need (e.g teenage parents/ lone parents; children and young people with disabilities) [xli] and it is a requirement that the funding must be used for services that are not provided through mainstream funding. As childcare does not receive mainstream funding and is not provided as a mainstream service (unlike early years education), these arrangements effectively mean EYDCPs are required to focus their childcare planning function in the main on developments in disadvantaged areas known as Cymorth Target areas. These are normally those wards identified as Communities First areas. Under the former Sure Start Programme, now absorbed into Cymorth, funding went to the seven Communities First areas [xlii] along with funding to City/ County wide projects and particular user

groups (City and County of Swansea, 2003e). In this sense the EYDCP has had, along with colleagues in Sure Start, a history of supporting childcare provision in disadvantaged areas. Hence it is not surprising that the anti-poverty/ social inclusion frame was particularly evident when discussing childcare policy with actors at this level. Cymorth will ensure that this focus on childcare for those 'in need' rather than childcare for all will continue to be a priority.

Members of the EYDCP were asked to reflect on how well they thought the Partnership had operated. Many commented on the significance of it being chaired by a member of the voluntary sector:

> And at the time that the LEA Development and Childcare Partnership was drawn up, it was sort of jointly social services and education. And it was easier for them to have a Chair who was not either of those vested interests, perhaps. Because up until that time, they had operated kind of independently so working together as a joint partnership wasn't easy, so having a Chair who wasn't particularly from either was OK. (Sarah Wilson, Voluntary Sector/ EYDCP)

> I think one of the unique things about the EYDCP in Swansea is that it is Chaired by someone from the voluntary sector (...) and that has certainly seen the benefit here, seeing as all the educational settings that are funded from Early Years come from the maintained sector. (Rita Daniels, Officer/ EYDCP)

There was a strong consensus that members of the EYDCP had good working relationships:

> Since the conception the biggest success has been the good quality working relationships, without a doubt. Starting from a group of people who didn't know each other at all, that has been really successful. Not always seeing eye to eye but always working well together. (Rita Daniels, Officer/ EYDCP)

> I think the people who are on the partnership have very good relationships. Nobody is afraid to speak up or put their views and it has totally strengthened it... (Debra Mason, Officer/ EYDCP)

Indeed, some members expressed the view that they did not want to see a situation where the identity of the EYDCP or Sure Start was lost under the new Framework Partnership and Cymorth arrangements:

> I think what we were most concerned about was that Sure Start would retain an identity because it has taken three and a half years to build that identity and I think families are recognising what it's about. (Erica Bell, Sure Start Officer)

Some were worried that the greater involvement of more senior officers through the Framework Partnership could undermine achievements at the operational level:

> The Early Years Partnership has managed to be effective because it has managed to get above the talking. We know each other quite well so you can talk...the people I met this morning...there were a number of people there who don't normally come to the meeting, higher line managers, so you don't say what you want to say. And it is not about talking. (Rita Daniels, Officer/ EYDCP)

It was agreed that on the basis of these strong working relationships that both EYDCP and Sure Start had been able to secure effective delivery of policy and support good practice across a range of areas. One Development Officer working on childcare projects in the voluntary sector felt that the opportunity to work within the framework of EYDCP was an important source of support. Similarly, Officers within Sure Start stressed that partnership working had contributed to the success of the Programme:

> Practically we work very closely with our Sure Start project partners and also other partners as well.....I think we are very lucky that the partnership working thing is very successful, both at a strategic level but certainly at the delivery level, we find we couldn't run the groups that we run if we didn't have the good will of the partners. (Erica Bell)

There was evidently considerable support for the concept of delivering childcare and other services for children, young people and their families through partnership. This

finding is supported by Helen Penn and Vicky Randall's research on local EYDCPs where they found 'many members were, or became, relatively positive about what the EYDCPS were achieving in airing issues and bringing people together' (2005: 89). In Swansea it was recognised that the new Framework Partnership arrangements were still evolving whilst existing partnership work within EYDCP and Sure Start was believed to be effective and actors working at the operational level did not want evolving arrangements to undermine this. Nevertheless, actors located in more senior positions, working at the strategic level, sometimes experienced this attitude as a resistance to change [xliii]. Evidently these new partnership arrangements will need to address these apparent tensions between actors at different levels in the hierarchy.

(ii) Consultation and participation

There is considerable interest in encouraging the participation of children and young people in policy processes across the UK (Hill *et al*, 2004; Matthews, 2003; Tisdall and Davis, 2004) whilst at the same time there are convincing arguments that children are increasingly controlled (James and James, 2001). The Assembly has followed through on the commitment to listen to children and young people in a variety of ways (WAG, 2004b). Under the new partnership and planning arrangements, the City and County of Swansea has made a commitment to consultation and participation with regard to children and young people and their carers. Evidently these concepts can embrace a range of types of activity involving carers and/or children in consultation, participation or evaluation of specific programmes. As Tisdall and Davis argue 'It is perhaps a result of the newness of children's and young people's participation that a wide range of activities is clustered under the label of participation' (2004: 131). This was evident in Swansea where

reports referred to a variety of ways of securing participation. One of the aims of the Swansea Children Partnership is that 'children are consulted and a system is developed to facilitate consultation and reporting back to children' (City and County of Swansea, 2003f: 5). Furthermore, one of its functions will be to 'ensure that its membership fully reflects those organisations working with children and their carers as well as children and their carers themselves' (City and County of Swansea, 2003f: 5). The Plan acknowledged that the Partnership needs to 'consider, as a priority, ways in which it can engage directly with children and their carers' (City and County of Swansea, 2003f: 5). Hence, this is an area that is likely to develop further in future.

Swansea EYDCP had attempted to find out about parents' views on childcare provision by commissioning Brunel University to undertake an audit into use of childcare services and unmet demand for those services (Brunel University, 2000). This included a survey of parents and interviews with parents. Another form of consultation took place into the childcare needs of black and minority ethnic women and was conducted by MEWN in 1998 with funding from many agencies involved in current partnerships including the City and County of Swansea (MEWN, 1998).

In Swansea there are ongoing commitments to pursuing consultation and participation. The research involved interviews with many local professionals and volunteers who were seeking to engage with carers and children. Nevertheless, members of local Partnerships acknowledged both conceptual and practical dilemmas arising from the need to consult and involve parents and children. It was sometimes felt that the officials within the Assembly had a poor understanding of

consultation. One senior officer suggested that there was a need for greater understanding of what user involvement entailed and the skills involved in getting it right:

> ....the whole consultation business is spurious in a number of respects, I think. Because you can find out what people want but if different people want different things and wanting something is different from getting it. There is money, there is vested interests, there might be legal things that have to be taken into account and you only get real change through the continual involvement of an organised and informed constituency with the policy-makers. And to do that you need a community development approach to work with those parents and that is a complicated, expensive, and highly skilled process and nobody understands that. The whole consultation business is based on different premises and it don't work, broadly. (Chris Coleman)

This was a theme also taken up by a member of the EYDCP:

> Consultation is one of the biggest hot potatoes that they have asked us to look at. Now, it is your interpretation of consultation. You are supposed to consult on the plan. Now does this mean to make you aware of where you can get a copy? What we have always tried to do is we have had a number of leaflets produced, we have had a number of events, we have had a number of conferences, exhibitions and we have had regular pieces in the media about the Partnership. So we feel all of that is part of consultation. (Rita Daniels)

It is evident from this response that the Officer was confusing consultation with publicity and information, illustrating the uncertainties of what is involved. Hence, there was awareness that consultation and engagement could mean different things and that the process needed particular skills and time if it was to be meaningful.

Where policy actors gave examples of user involvement, it was generally in relation to specific initiatives such as the development of an Integrated Children's Centre in Swansea. Other members suggested that although EYDCP did not consult parents routinely through direct measures, that most member agencies were in contact with parents on a regular basis:

> ...by and large the Partnerships are partnerships of agencies and providers rather than including parents. Except that because of the kind of partnership it is, if you went round the table I would imagine you would find 90 to 100% who work very closely with parents, mothers mainly, of children within the City and County of Swansea. There is a view, I think you are getting a parental view, if there is such a thing. (Sarah Wilson, EYDCP)
>
> What we would say is that through wide membership of the Partnership we would hope to get feedback on some of these issues. And I feel as far as the parent thing, there is a Dads' Worker for Sure Start and...the Parenting Officer, there is a Language and Play Co-ordinator, we would hope things are fed back. (Rita Daniels, EYDCP)

The focus has thus been on securing user involvement at the level of individual projects. However, it is possible that efforts to consult parents universally and outside the areas targeted for community regeneration would prove difficult. My visits within the three case study areas revealed that collaboration with parents was highly labour intensive and time consuming.

There are also some issues surrounding who should be the target for user involvement with regard to children's services. In the case of childcare and early years provision this has been located within a broader framework of services for children. The emphasis encouraged by the Assembly is on the participation of children and young people, rather than their carers. However, the principles of Sure Start have included working with families and facilitating community involvement (Bagley *et al*, 2004; Gustafsson and Driver, 2005) and this has meant that user involvement is interpreted more broadly to include carers as well as children. There has been a tradition of working with and engaging young people through the Young People Forum. This has meant that there have been systems already in place that have been developed to ensure young people can influence policy within the new Partnerships:

> The theory is that any issue to do with young people and policy should come to the Young People Committee and is fed through to the Young People Partnership serviced by professionals, by Youth Forum Co-Ordinator and by the Young People Partnership Co-ordinator. (Chris Coleman, Senior Officer)

A similar system was not currently in place for either the age group catered for by the Children Partnership or for carers. However, it is possible that the Children's Information Service, currently being developed, could provide a structure for greater engagement of younger children and their carers.

(iii) Information and Publicity

I will now consider information services on childcare. In Chapter Seven the perspectives of parents on seeking information about childcare services will be examined.

The *Childcare Action Plan* (WAG, 2002a) established a duty for each Local Authority to provide a 'staffed and computerised childcare information service' by March 2003 operating according to national minimum standards. Some EYDCPs in Wales provided information services on childcare prior to the duty. In England and Scotland, EYDCPs had made information available through Childcare Link [xliv] launched in December 1999 as part of the National Childcare Strategy in England and Scotland. The service provides web-based access to information about childcare and early years services in each Local Authority area. The details of local Children's Information Services (CIS) are provided on this site. During the period of fieldwork, Wales had not provided information through Childcare Link. Whilst some Welsh Local Authorities did provide equivalent information on their own web-sites, others

did not and the quality of the information provided was variable. In the City and County of Swansea no information about the CIS or the EYDCP was provided on the web-site until early 2005.

It is now possible to access information about each Welsh Local Authority's CIS via Childcare Link. However, the information that is provided remains highly variable. At one end of the spectrum are Local Authorities that provide a brief description of their CIS and a contact number. Swansea is one of these Local Authorities. At the other end are Local Authorities such as Wrexham and Gwynedd that use their CIS link to provide detailed information about local childcare and early years provision, other services for children and young people, parenting support and relevant policy documents. This variability was recognised by the WAG Childcare Working Group (WAG, CWG, 2005: 14, para 3.4) and the need for further funding to enable the extension of services was recommended.

Each Welsh local authority area must establish and maintain a public information service on childcare provision as part of a CIS [xlv]. There are minimum quality standards for CISs in Wales (WAG, 2003c) and these standards had to be met by October 2004. Among other things it is expected that:

> On the website, a search for "childcare" should lead to the children's information service. There should be links to the Assembly web site and to other local children's information services, especially those that are within the immediate travel to work area. (WAG, 2003c)

Swansea CIS did not provide a statement of service and contact phone number on the web-site until early 2005. A search for "childcare" still does not produce a link to the CIS as required by the Guidance. A search for Children's Information Service does

provide a link to the statement of service. However, parents would need to be aware that childcare information is located within a CIS in order for them to find it. The link to the CIS is not well sign-posted and does not provide links to other local CISs or to the Assembly web-site as required under the guidance. The Swansea CIS, therefore, still did not meet these minimum requirements nearly two years after the deadline.

Swansea CIS has evidently some way to go before a comprehensive centralised and localised information service is offered. However, some progress has been achieved in the production of written information (City and County of Swansea, 2004a). This has included Childcare directories and a Sure Start programme Directory for parents. These form part of the new CIS, provide a contact phone number and callers can request a childcare list suitable to their needs. Hence, developments have taken place since parents were interviewed for my research but the CIS is still working to meet targets (City and County of Swansea, 2004b).

Regional policy actors acknowledged that there were significant differences between Welsh local authorities with regard to progress in the delivery of information services:

> I think the Children's Information Service in Wales is quite uneven in terms of how good or bad they are. They are a relatively new institution anyway.
> (Keith Hall, Assembly Member)

In Swansea some members of the EYDCP pointed out that they had been active in producing information for parents about childcare prior to the recent statutory requirements:

> The other thing that I would say is that we have disseminated a lot of good practice as a Partnership. The Choice is Yours booklet made for people, this was before the Children's Information Officer Post, we had it for a number of years. (Rita Daniels, Officer/ EYDCP)

However, all local policy actors agreed that Swansea was behind other authorities in developing this service according to statutory requirements, more needed to be done in this area and that the appointment of the Children's Information Service Manager would enable them to move forward. Some actors pointed out that the planned Children's Integrated Centre would also act as a focal point for information. It is to be hoped that as these initiatives reach fruition there will be more information and guidance for parents seeking childcare so that Swansea provides a service comparable to that in other authorities.

(iv) Sustainability

Local policy actors, whilst sometimes broadly supportive of the welfare to work agenda, were aware that in practice this agenda faced significant problems. Many referred to the problem of sustaining childcare projects in areas of deprivation. This was seen as the major challenge in the delivery of childcare policy:

> I think our big issue has always been sustainability. You know it is terribly easy to give money to agencies and organisations to have so many extra places. But if you are getting it for one year and they can't sustain it in the future, what do you think you are doing? The gaps are associated largely around geographical distribution, I think. There are big issues in the welfare-to-work agenda of gaps that relate to wrap-around and after and pre-school facility in terms of there's sustainability. (Sarah Wilson, Voluntary Sector/ EYDCP)

> Some projects have an exit policy and this always boils down to sustainability. So that is the only drawback. Projects don't know from year to year whether they are still going to be there because there is no set agreement that funding will be ongoing. (Debra Mason, Officer/ EYDCP)

Local policy actors thus confirmed concerns regarding the delivery of childcare policy in the UK raised in previous chapters. Delivery through the market alongside limited targeted funding leaves many gaps and makes the long-term planning of childcare provision difficult (Lewis, 2003). These insights place the claims of policy texts that promote the gender equality/ children's rights/ inclusion narratives in their true context. As I argued earlier, it is at the local level and in relation to specific local childcare markets that the contradictions of policy will be highlighted. The problem of sustainability thus symbolises those contradictions.

CONCLUSION: DISCONNECTIONS IN POLICY?

I have considered the perspectives of policy actors involved in childcare policy at regional and local levels. These actors draw on the discursive frames embedded in policy texts when talking about why the childcare agenda is important. The 'economic' frame and the 'children's interests' frame were particularly strong at the regional and local levels respectively. All policy actors expressed commitment to using childcare to assist in community regeneration and tackling child poverty. Whilst all actors tap into the discourses identified in Chapters Three and Four there appears to be a greater awareness at the local level of the potential difficulties in making this agenda work in practice.

Whilst the National Childcare Strategy and Welsh childcare policy claim benefits will be available for *all* parents, in relation to funding and the structures for delivery this provision is targeted at communities of need whether defined in geographical

terms or another indicator. It is also evident that in Swansea the development work in areas of deprivation has taken up most of the time of partners. The development of services that should be available *universally* to all parents such as the CIS has in comparison been slow. This may help to explain the discrepancy between parental perspectives on childcare policy and provision that I will be exploring next and the perspectives of professionals who were evidently coping with significant workloads and high (and constantly shifting) expectations from the Assembly. Nevertheless it is evident that many other local authority areas in Wales have progressed further than Swansea in developing universal information services through their local CIS.

With regard to the focus of this research on the connections between care, parenting and gender, I have argued that childcare is a policy arena that has largely sidelined these difficult issues. Given the commitment of the Assembly to gender mainstreaming and the entry of 'femocrats' (Charles, 2004) into the political apparatus, it is disappointing that childcare policy has not been fully connected to gender issues. There is little evidence at either the regional or the local level of a sophisticated understanding of how childcare connects with 'recognition' and 'redistribution' claims in relation to gender parity. Whilst regional policy actors were able to reflect on the potential role equity benefits of childcare, this was mainly expressed in relation to providing opportunities for women to engage in paid work, to have access to career opportunities and achieve financial independence. Local policy actors talked about the needs of vulnerable mothers and fathers for support. Their focus was mainly on a social justice agenda expressed in relation to poverty and disadvantage rather than gender. Gender really only came into play because many of these local professionals were working with lone mothers and their children.

The allocation of Sure Start funding to work with fathers was important and did signify a commitment to providing support for fathers to maintain contact with their children and engage in care. In addition some local policy actors working with minority ethnic families expressed a desire to respect local cultural preferences where mothers wished to stay home with their children. Local policy actors also seemed more likely than regional policy actors to support the 'gendered moral rationalities' of the families with whom they worked rather than to question them. This could be because they also hold values in common with those gendered moral rationalities or because they believe it is important to recognise and respect cultural preferences. The absence of a gender equality policy within the City and County of Swansea was notable and it was instructive that I was advised to discuss my interest in this matter with the Officer responsible for Welsh Language development. Despite repeated phone calls she failed to respond to my queries.

Returning finally to the issue of 'doing policy differently' in Wales, in *Making the Connections: Delivering Better Services for Wales* (WAG, 2004d), the Assembly has set out plans for the delivery of public services. Rejecting what is described as the 'competitive' model of delivering services, claims for distinctiveness are made in relation to a 'collaborative' model:

> ..a collaborative model fits better with Wales' size as a small country of three million people, our geographical pattern with an absence of large metropolitan areas and Welsh values and attitudes and sense of ownership in our public services. (Rhodri Morgan AM, Foreword, WAG, 2004d)

The plans continue the theme that the Assembly is distinctive in its commitment to particular political values and styles of policy-making (Chaney and Fevre, 2001; Chaney *et al*, 2000). There is a commitment to developing 'citizen-centred services'

and ensuring democratic accountability so that the Assembly in partnership with local government takes the lead. My interviews with regional and local policy actors suggest that there is an understanding and appreciation within the policy-making community of these values and style of approach. However, it remains to be seen whether the parents in my study feel that this has made a difference in their daily lives and whether they feel that childcare offers them 'citizen-centred services'. In the next chapter I begin to explore their perspectives. I shall return to the interviews with policy actors in my Concluding Chapter.

CHAPTER SIX

THE DAILY CARE OF CHILDREN FROM THE STANDPOINT OF PARENTS: GENDER, MORAL CODES AND SOCIAL SUPPORT.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter will explore the perspectives of parents about the social relations of care, their daily caring practices and the material and emotional concerns that shape these practices. I intend to illuminate how parents justified their particular care practices. The chapter thus seeks to assess the implications of personal choices and family circumstances for public policies on childcare. The chapter concentrates on the conduct of care from the perspective of *mothers*. My main interest was in finding out how women experienced the transition to motherhood and being with young children. However, I conducted a smaller number of interviews with fathers and grandmothers as a basis for exploring gender relations and the place of informal support in the care of young children. The interviews with fathers are considered in the final section of this chapter. The interviews with grandmothers are referred to in the discussion of informal care.

There are three aspects of the conceptual framework introduced in Chapter One that guide this analysis. First, feminist standpoint theory and 'institutional ethnography' help to uncover the connections between gendered family practices, ideologies, discourses and the 'relations of ruling' (Smith, 1988). In this context my particular interest is in the 'relations of ruling' at the level of the national and regional state

and, following Smith, in textual discourses that can be uncovered in policy. So the policy analysis has tried to illuminate the discursive frames deployed by the state and by policy actors in furthering the childcare and parenting agenda. It has been apparent that these discursive frames may be in tension with each other and with wider, deep-seated ideologies relating to mothering. Moreover, the policy actors may select particular aspects of these frames in reaching their own understanding of their role in policy delivery and professional discourses may play a part in this process. There is now a need to explore how mothers and fathers relate to this and how they too negotiate the tensions. This leads to the second aspect of my conceptual framework, the social construction of family practices with reference to 'gendered moral rationalities' (Duncan and Edwards, 1999) and the ideologies of 'sensitive/ intensive mothering' (Hays, 1996; Walkerdine and Lucey, 1989). The accounts of the mothers and fathers concerning how they 'do childcare' will be revealed as 'socially organized practices' (Smith, 1997: 393) that are gendered and are justified with reference to moral codes. Despite differences amongst the mothers in their domestic and childcare arrangements, there is firm evidence that their values and practices are shaped by the ideology of 'sensitive/ intensive mothering'. Yet, like the mothers in Hays' research, they may seek to meet the cultural expectations of mothers embraced by the ideology in ways that fit their material circumstances. In doing so they negotiate the contradictory expectations of the relations of ruling that now place women as paid workers, as well-informed educators and as 'good' mothers. This in turn links with the third element of my framework, the location of caring practices within wider networks of family/ community support. My findings support claims that social and emotional capital play a crucial role in the operation of gendered local networks (Edwards and Gillies, 2005). I shall illustrate that these

networks may be crucial for helping mothers negotiate the expectations that face them. The sensitive/ intensive mother faces many pressures in reconciling the demands of employment and family policy and ensuring their children do well in an increasingly competitive and consumerist society. Many rely on local social networks to achieve this and draw on the gendered moral rationalities of the networks to justify their particular arrangements.

Individual interviews were conducted with twenty-five mothers, six fathers and two grandmothers. I also carried out two group interviews, one with mothers with children at a local nursery school and the other with fathers involved with a Sure Start project. Full details of the sample can be found in Appendix 3 and the research methodology has been outlined in Chapter Two. I was able to interview parents in a wide variety of circumstances and this will be illustrated in the cases selected for discussion.

SECTION ONE: MOTHERS' PERSPECTIVES ON CARE

The mothers' accounts were analysed thematically and the data are discussed in relation to four areas:

(a) Transitions to motherhood: benefit and loss.

The mothers were asked to reflect on how the transition to motherhood had impacted on them. Most had been in paid work prior to the birth of their eldest child and most made changes in their paid work as a consequence of motherhood:

> ...before I became pregnant with (child), for a few months I went back to work in a nursing home. And I was enjoying that but when I fell pregnant with (child) I kept vomiting every day for the whole nine months! I was ill all the time....And since I have had him I haven'tgone back to work except at (Centre where she does voluntary work). (Sally, single parent, one child)

> I was clerk in a school so I was working full-time and after I had (child), I mean, you know it was cheaper to stay at home for the small salary that I had at the time than to pay a creche. It wasn't worth it with everything, paying transport, creche. And in a way I enjoyed it more as well! (Natalie, single parent, one child)

Many of the mothers changed their work arrangements over time as they tried to find a balance between work and care that suited their needs:

> I have always worked full-time. I used to work in (City) for the same company that I work for now...I was acting manager. I went on maternity leave with my eldest child..for 4 months, and I returned using a nursery in (City) for 3 days a week. My husband at the time then, he worked shifts, so he had the children the other 2 days a week. I did that for 4 months and it got a bit much. Then I reduced my hours to working 3 days a week.
> (Lowri, single parent, 2 children)

Lowri then fell pregnant again but was encouraged to apply for promotion within her Company for a full-time job that would involve relocation. She took this option and returned to full-time work following the birth of her second child, whilst her children were cared for by their father and attended a private day nursery on a part-time basis. This case illustrates how a mother's patterns of paid work and care can shift rapidly

during the early years of childhood and as new opportunities are presented. Lowri was unusual in relation to the other mothers in that her former husband shared responsibility for care during these early years and her pregnancy did not prevent her Company from offering her opportunities for promotion.

The transition to motherhood was analysed in terms of perceptions of benefit and loss. It was clear that the transition to motherhood had major implications for all of the mothers whatever their specific circumstances. Generally the mothers' ambitions for a career or financial independence took a secondary role to their assessment of what was 'best' for their children, an issue reported by Williams (2004b) and discussed later in the chapter.

However, the women differed in terms of how much *power* they had to choose how they distributed their paid work and childcare. This was shaped by their conditions of employment, by their material circumstances, by whether it was perceived to be practical to combine work and care, by (where appropriate) their husband or partner's paid work and whether they felt that they could cope with both working and caring. I will compare the transitions experienced by Gail and Becky to illustrate this. The two mothers were similar in that they were white, middle-class mothers married to men in full-time employment and living in Shaw in comfortable material circumstances. Both had held full-time professional posts prior to motherhood. Yet whilst Gail felt that she had lost status and an interesting job following maternity, Becky relished the freedom of being at home and did not wish to return to work.

Gail had continued in full-time paid work as a team manager for a large company following the birth of her eldest child. She had planned to continue on a full-time basis following the birth of her second child but:

> They made it so awkward when I went back, I was going back all along, I was going back full-time all along. Then I went for a meeting before starting back, about four weeks before I was due to start back and they had disbanded my team, so I didn't have a team to manage and they wanted to absorb me into someone else's team...
>
> They wanted me to retrain to become a computer programmer and I was quite annoyed at the fact that when it suited them they wanted me to do it, when I had asked eight years beforehand *when I didn't have any children and I could really commit myself to it*, that's what I wanted to do. *And I thought it is not the right time for me to do it with two young children and the travelling.*
> (Gail, my emphasis)

It is the *combination* of unfavourable circumstances at work and the responsibility for young children that led to Gail's decision to accept a redundancy package following the birth of her second child. A more vigorous equality policy could have protected her status while on maternity leave so that she didn't lose her management role. Yet this may not have been enough to encourage Gail to stay in work as her reflections suggest the stresses of travel and meeting the needs of two young children influenced the decision. She had been suffering from poor health on account of the travel and the stress. This case reveals the complexity of factors that may impact on a mother's decisions on how best to organise paid work and the care of children.

Becky was a Civil Servant before the birth of her eldest child and returned to her post on a part-time basis when he was two years old. When pregnant with her second child she took the option to take a Career Break and she had since given birth to a third child. She had been on the Career Break for four years when interviewed. She

could take a maximum of six years by which time all of her children would be in school. In reflecting on her future plans she explained:

> When I do go back to work there is a good chance that I could plan to go back part-time, term-time. And be with the children school holidays. Thirteen weeks! Plus I get a condition so I could arrange my working day only part-time within school hours so I wouldn't have to employ a childminder myself. (Becky)

She would also be able to return to the same job at the same grade. Becky was currently working part-time as an unregistered childminder. She talked about how much she enjoyed being in this position and being able to spend time with the children:

> I enjoy most of it! It is very demanding, very, very demanding. I think I am much busier than actually going out to work for an employer...Out of the two I prefer to be with the children. And I always had the intention that when the children did come along, that if we could afford it, that I would like to be with them. And I don't think there is anything wrong with that. (Becky)

As a consequence of her enjoyment at being home, Becky said she was unlikely to return to her previous post despite the favourable conditions. In this case Becky perceived the position of her husband who was in full-time well paid work as something that was to her advantage as she comments 'I think I am very fortunate actually. I don't know any of my friends who are in that position. I think, from a financial point of view I am lucky as well'.

Becky was able to exercise a choice to stay home while her children were young because her employer offered generous parental leave and her material circumstances were secure. She was willing to forego the status and independence afforded by her paid employment in order to do something that she found more fulfilling. In contrast,

Gail felt a sense of loss, feeling she had been forced out of a job that she enjoyed through a combination of work-related, health-related and practical factors. Both women were now dependent on male breadwinners as a consequence of motherhood and neither expressed unease in this regard. Both talked about the joys of spending time with young children. Nevertheless, for Gail, motherhood had involved some costs and a sense of loss. Despite her strong commitment to using her professional skills in paid work and her willingness to use formal childcare, she found herself conducting low paid, part-time unskilled work as an evening supermarket cashier in order to fit in with the children's needs and her husband's full-time job. The stresses of travel, demotion in her professional work and childcare were too much to negotiate.

In this section I have suggested that the themes of benefit and loss and maternal well being or stress emerged from the mothers' accounts of the transition to motherhood. These themes continued to be significant as the mothers reflected on how they managed childcare on a daily basis.

(b) Daily routines: managing care, domestic labour and paid work.

Many of the mothers represented domestic labour and care as not counting as 'work' supporting Smith's claims that 'institutional ideologies' are influential as mothers account for their experiences of care. As Smith argues, women's relationship to the ruling apparatus is expressed in their 'work' which 'has been both necessary to and unrecognized by it' (1988: 153). Women generally do not see the value in their caring work at a *societal* level as the ideologies of family life and motherhood only

articulate that value in *individualistic* ways. This means mothers place value on 'being around' for their children and 'keeping on top' of domestic tasks as their contribution to their family. Complex, gendered moral codes (Duncan and Edwards, 1999; Duncan *et al*, 2004) operate as mothers simultaneously express pride in and enjoyment of their role as 'mother' and 'homemaker' and frustration, guilt and stress when they find it hard to cope. This ambivalence was expressed both by mothers participating in largely traditional domestic arrangements and those who felt that they shared duties with their husband or partner. The perception of whether care and domestic tasks were shared fairly or equally also varied, meaning that some mothers reporting what appeared to be a traditional division of labour perceived that their arrangements were egalitarian. Mothers rarely expressed the view that husbands and partners could make a greater contribution to care and domestic work. Although they could be reluctant to divulge those feelings publicly, it seems more likely that the 'taken-for-granted' nature of care and gendered moral codes explain this lack of concern for achieving a redistribution of caring labour. In the next section I will provide some examples drawn from the accounts of two mothers who reported a fairly traditional division of care and domestic labour. Following this I will move to some examples of mothers whose arrangements came closer to a shared model of care.

(i) 'Taking it in my stride'- Gender, work and domestic labour: justifying traditional practices.

In the case of the mothers considered here the traditional 'breadwinner- homemaker gender contract' (Rees, 1999) retained some hold, even where the women were also engaged in paid work. It was common for the mothers to claim that their husband

worked harder than they did. **Gail**, for example, had sole responsibility for her two children during the day and worked as a cashier in the evening once her husband arrived home from work. There was a sense of rush and urgency in the way she described her daily routine and this seemed to be partly because she felt she had to have dinner ready before she left:

> It is quite difficult then if anything upsets the routine and everything goes to pot then. It is quite stressful thinking, I have got to have everything ready for five o'clock and he comes through the door starving and I have got to have a meal before I go to work as well and make sure the girls are alright as well. (Gail)

Despite acknowledging the stress of this situation, this had not apparently led to any negotiation with her husband around who should cook the tea. When asked to reflect on these arrangements:

> Basically it was the deal when I gave up work! (Laughing) He'll say, "oh, you're at home all day, you can do the cooking, the cleaning and the ironing and everything". *And, I think it is fair enough.* If he's at work all day, he can't come home and cook his own tea. So, it's just the way I see things....As he's been working so many hours I just keep the house going.
>
> ..he'll get the hoover out if he can. But the last couple of months because he has been working so many hours, he's got to have a rest somewhere as well. *I don't class mine as a working day as strenuous as his* but it is in other ways, not physical but on the go. (Gail, my emphasis)

Gail thus justified a traditional division of labour on the grounds that the husband's paid work was perceived to be harder than her work in the home. These extracts strongly support claims that the mother *does not count* her role in care and domestic labour as work of equal importance as the paid work undertaken by her husband. Put another way, these are cultural practices in which the value of unpaid care is not fully recognised.

I referred in Chapter Two to my difficulties in encouraging many of the mothers to reflect on their arrangements because of the 'taken for-granted' nature of their role in the home. In many cases they seemed to want to present an image of 'being on top' of their role and not making a fuss about it. Stella's response was typical of many of the mothers:

> I just take it for granted...all in my stride, as I said, and just get on with it. I have always had to get on with it so I mean I just do it. (Stella)

Joy was not in paid work at the time of the interview. Her husband was in full-time employment. She had been on a Government training scheme shortly before her pregnancy and had given this up after getting married because she was no longer eligible for remission of the course fees. Joy and her husband held fairly traditional views about the role of mothers:

> I would want to go back to work eventually. At the moment we are lucky I don't have to, there's no need for me to work because (husband) is one of these people who prefers me to be at home with (child) while we can manage it rather than me go out to work as well and (child) not see either of us.

In describing the daily routines, it appeared that Joy took main responsibility for care of their child during the week when her husband was at work but there was a sharing of domestic duties:

> We tend to share quite a bit of the cooking but if it is teatime meals I normally cook them, but on the weekend we tend to share...Ironing, neither of us like to do it, so if it needs doing, it gets done when it needs it. Cleaning, we tend to share between us if there is stuff I haven't been able to do during the week....

Joy described a very busy routine of entertaining her son during the week and differed from many of the mothers in being willing to let domestic tasks slip in order

to do this. Hence, her routines were a mix of both traditional (full-time mother for child) and more egalitarian/ liberal (shared domestic labour but no fixed routine). Despite there being some aspects of Joy's daily routines that she perceived to be egalitarian and fair, some more traditional views influenced her perception of this in that she expressed gratitude towards her husband for being willing to help:

> I think to a certain extent (husband) does more than most people I know whose partners do. Because (husband) will come in from work and play with (child) and help me get (child) ready for bed and bath (child). (Husband) does an awful lot for the amount of time he works as well. Like I suffered from depression for a long time and I get very tired in the afternoon and so (husband) will come in from work and have (child) for the hour or so for me to go and have a sleep. He has just done a full day's work himself, so I think he is very good.

The contribution of her husband to childcare and domestic labour was not taken for granted but was seen as exceptional. This expression of gratitude where a husband or partner contributed to domestic tasks also emerged in other interviews. Other mothers referred to a husband or partner as being 'very good' where they contributed to domestic tasks suggesting this should be seen as unusual and praise-worthy rather than to be expected.

(ii) Towards egalitarian care practices: mothers and fathers sharing the burden?

Here I shall provide two examples where the mother was in full-time employment and believed that childcare and domestic labour was shared equally with the father. I shall provide a further example where the father was described as a 'housedad' and the mother was combining work and part-time study.

Hameeda was a married Bangladeshi woman with one child. She worked full-time during the day in the voluntary sector, whilst her husband worked evenings as a chef. They shared childcare without any use of formal provision or the regular involvement of wider family. As her husband began work after four o'clock, her employers had agreed that the child could play in her place of work after being dropped off until Hameeda finished work. Hameeda expressed concern that Bangladeshi girls, including those within her own extended family, were not treated equally with the boys and were relied on by family to help with care of younger siblings. She was determined that she was going to conduct her own care arrangements in, what she perceived to be, a more egalitarian manner:

> I am working and my husband is working and I have only got a nuclear family...But my sister is having problems, she is moving backwards and I am moving forwards....
>
> I get away with it as my in-laws aren't here. As a Muslim, it would be the duty of the housewife to look after the elders. My husband does have quite a large family and I went back to Bangladesh and visited them. They had never seen me before.

Hameeda stressed that their division of labour was equal and that her husband was better at some aspects of care and domestic work than she was:

> I have problems because I am a bit messy! Like with the nappies, my husband is better at doing it than I am. All our daily routines have been divided up between us. When my husband is doing one thing, I am doing another.

Sheila was in full-time work and her husband was also working full-time. She was a white mother, employed in education in a professional role and had one child aged three years. She did not use any formal childcare but had considerable informal support from both her mother and mother-in-law. She described a shared division of labour with her husband:

> We share things equally. Because a lot of the time he works from home. So he takes (child) to my mother's or my mother-in-law's on a morning and I pick her up. And generally we share the ironing, the housework, the cleaning. The only thing I do is the shopping, he doesn't.

Nevertheless, Sheila seemed to make a distinction between domestic labour, which she would share with her husband, and certain aspects of the care of her child for which she liked to take responsibility. This included the bedtime and bath-time routine and visiting the doctor. In this sense she appeared to be influenced both by discourses around gender equality and those around being a 'sensitive/ intensive' mother. I shall return to this issue in the next section.

Christine was a white, working class mother with three children. She was married and was the only mother who described her husband as a 'housedad'. Both Christine and her husband had a history of doing low paid, unskilled work since having their children. They had each moved in and out of employment trying to fit around each other so that one of them was available to care for the children:

> We had our child. Then I got a job in a call centre and then I moved to another job in another call centre....Then I had the baby, stopped work as my husband got a job then. So I was at home then with the three of them. We both got a job then in...in the new (supermarket) and both of us were working so it was like six trips back and forth and it was too much. So my husband stopped, so it was just me going out and then I got a job in (shop) in..(area of Swansea) and then I moved to (Nursing Home).

Christine had decided to apply for a College course in Nursing Studies combined with experience in a Nursing Home to move away from this pattern of unpredictable employment. However, she was unable to drive and so relied on her husband to do the school and nursery run and to take her to College and her place of employment. This routine was making it impractical for him to seek work:

> The way we are at the moment is because I want to go to college. So with the baby down at nursery, my husband can't get a job because he is trying to fit it round the hours....So he is at home and I am working. When I finish College the baby will be at nursery and he will go and get a job then as he won't have to worry about me having to get to College.

Christine found it necessary to justify why her husband was currently not in paid work suggesting the role of 'househusband' was not perceived as natural and was not expected to continue. Christine described a routine in which tasks such as cleaning, washing laundry and tidying up were shared, cooking would be her responsibility unless she was working and looking after the needs of the baby fell to her. This combination of traditional and more egalitarian allocation of tasks was common to other families in the research where partners were living together.

(c) Being there and liking it: moral codes and childcare.

All the mothers appeared to be influenced by moral discourses around motherhood and expectations that they should demonstrate their competence in this role. Some mothers would distinguish between domestic tasks that they shared with partners and the personal/ emotional care of their children, where they tended to retain responsibility. I was able to recognise this pattern as it is one that operates in the way my husband and myself distribute responsibilities.[xlvi] This commitment to playing an educational, creative and involved role was common in all the mothers' accounts regardless of how they combined paid work and care and irrespective of class or ethnic background.

There are three issues that emerged strongly from the mothers' accounts of looking after their children. First, mothers generally presented the time spent with their children as an enjoyable experience and were often reluctant to discuss what they did not enjoy. Second, mothers made comments about the need to 'be there' for their children and to make time for them. Third, mothers emphasised their educational role; expressed both in terms of the general socialisation of their children and in terms of supporting the work of nursery or school. I will illustrate these themes below.

(i) Caring for Children as Fulfilment

When mothers were asked what they most enjoyed doing with their children they generally responded with enthusiasm:

> The sheer enthusiasm and eagerness for life and we see things that she sees for the first time. When she is in awe of things, I think that is magic. She will talk to you and she will ask you questions. But everything is exciting to her. I am seeing things through her eyes. And I like the close contact. (Gillian)

However, when asked directly if there were any aspects of childcare that the mothers did not enjoy, many of the mothers found it difficult to answer. I would offer examples from my own experience to open up discussion around this:

> Well, if you don't like anything what can you do about it anyway? (Gail)
>
> No, I just take it all in my stride! I'm quite happy with everything. (Stella)

These comments revealed once again the taken-for-granted assumption that childcare is something that is natural and that mothers should demonstrate that they are on top of it. There is a taboo regarding complaining about it. Although some of the mothers did mention specific things that were difficult- for example, getting her daughter to

eat (Sheila), using public transport with a young child (Joy) and coping with tantrums (Becky, Diane), these are referred to as little problems within the context of a generally fulfilling experience. It is also significant that these examples are those which are recognised in childcare manuals, women's magazines and parenting web-sites and are age-related. Hence, mothers may feel they have permission to speak about these issues so long as they do this in a matter-of-fact way in which they show this is something to be expected and they can handle it. The resonance of the mothers' responses with wider textual discourses supports Smith's claims that social practices may be shaped by textual discourse (Smith, 1990b). It was more unusual for a mother to express feelings about the whole routine being difficult as in the extract below:

> Just the mundane, the mundane things. It's doing the wash on the weekends and doing the ironing and cooking and still having to do the reading when all they want to do is go and play really. (Lowri)

I had expected expressions of frustration and being worn down to have been more widespread because this is how I was feeling about childcare at this time. Where mothers did express feelings of stress, this came out at other points in the interview rather than in response to this direct question. I will return to this issue in a later section.

Some mothers found that motherhood had changed their attitudes to paid work. Some enjoyed being home with their children more than being in paid work, even where they had previously valued a career. **Kelly**, for example, was a white, middle class mother with two children. She worked in the health service and was now working for three days per week:

> To be honest, I think my life is a lot more enjoyable, splitting it between the children and work....I did drop a grade, which I might not have needed to do. But, you know, I think I have got the best of both worlds....I am not sure I want to get up to that level again. There is a lot of stress involved....

This points to an issue that those focusing on ensuring women have equal access to paid work do not recognise. Some of the mothers expressed a view that paid work was not necessarily enjoyable or fulfilling, on the contrary, that it was stressful. This helps to explain why some expressed a preference to be home with their children.

Gillian provided another example of this changed perspective on paid work. She was married with one child. She had worked for the Civil Service for many years and had continued in her job on a part-time basis after the birth. However, she had recently given up this job for a new part-time post closer to home and with hours that would fit in better with childcare. She explained how her priorities had shifted:

> I could easily give up work now whereas before I went to work and it was my social life, to see all my friends. Since I had my (child), my whole thing about work has changed. I go to work, do my stuff and then come home and put my family first. I waited so long for (child) that I don't want anything to take the time that I spend with (child).

These examples suggest that if childcare policy is to meet parental preferences and mothers' perceptions of what is in their children's best interests, more will need to be done to support those who wish to spend time at home with their children.

There were other mothers who stressed that they liked being able to work, who strongly supported the 'work ethic' and who were in favour of current efforts by the Government to encourage mothers to engage in paid work. This revealed a wide diversity of preferences amongst mothers regarding the balance they wanted between

care and paid work. This is an issue that is discussed further in the next chapter in relation to the use of formal childcare.

(ii) 'Being there for them'- mothers' strategies to ensure the children come first.

> ..both mothers and children in a range of Western societies may define a key aspect of caring for children in terms of 'being there'. This is a subtle and complex notion that includes ideas of potential availability and psychological attentiveness that cannot be encompassed within notions of mothering as 'work' and that depend crucially on a sense of connectedness in the world... (Ribbens McCarthy and Edwards, 2002: 210)

This notion of 'being there' emerged repeatedly during the interviews and in a variety of contexts. Fiona Williams (2004b) argues that 'being there' for children is one possible preference expressed by mothers in an effort to 'do the right thing' for them. Similarly, Deborah Lupton and Virginia Schmed found in their study of Australian mothers that the concept of 'being there' could be used to explore their accounts:

> The women I interviewed were not simply speaking of a number of domestic and childcare chores that needed to be done, when they spoke of their desire to "be there" for their children. They were describing emotional shift work, which, in their view, would need to be done by them, regardless of whether they worked or not. (2002: 467)

This was also true of the mothers that I interviewed and supports the claims that I made in Chapter Three that there are limits in the degree to which commodified childcare can free mothers from emotional labour. Those mothers that had changed their conditions of paid employment following childbirth would often justify this in terms of wishing to give time to their children:

> I've been there for them! You know, see them off in the morning, pick them up at night and nobody else is doing that. It has been quite lucky that since (youngest child) has gone to school I haven't had to rely on anyone else to pick her up or drop her off. (Gail)

> I just try to fit it in. I didn't want to spend too much time too far away from (child). To work ten hours per day and then I didn't see (child). That is something that I didn't want to do because they give you so much. (Danielle)
>
> I don't have a very stressful job, where I have to take work home, take the stress of work home and take it out on the children. There is nothing like that. (Emma)

The two mothers that I interviewed who were childminding both pointed out that this was a source of income that enabled them to 'be there' for their own children. As Margaret points out:

> I wouldn't like to go back to work. If I had to go to a job I wouldn't, I would rather stay home. At the moment I have got the best of both worlds. I am home with my children and getting paid. But I don't think I would like to go and work in a shop and leave my children.

Similarly, there were some mothers who were concerned that the demands of their paid work was impacting in a negative way on their ability to be there for their child and fulfil the mothering role in the way that they wished. **Sheila** was a mother who appeared to benefit from her employment conditions and used this actively to maximise the time spent with her daughter. Nevertheless she was making plans to change her situation so that the balance between work and care shifted more towards care. She was currently working full-time in education. She had been working full-time until her pregnancy and converted to a part-time contract after the birth until her child was two years old. However, she was then persuaded to go back on a full-time contract:

> I made a kind of deal with the (line manager) that I would work full-time because he wanted me to go full-time if he allowed my daughter to come in the (education setting) with me for half a day. Which he agreed on. So for a year (child) came with me half day so I could still see her. *I didn't want to work all day without seeing her.* (Sheila, my emphasis)

After this year, Sheila's child was old enough to begin school nursery for half days. Sheila had a lot of support from family to cover the other half of the day while she was still working. Despite this support Sheila was very unhappy that she was now working full-time and no longer seeing her child during the day. At the time of interview this new arrangement had been going on for two months and Sheila had decided it was unsatisfactory and she regretted the agreement to go full-time:

> I want to go back part-time. I will be asking to go back part-time in September. I feel I am missing out. I come home from work, I am always home, apart from Monday, at four o'clock. Taking Monday, for example, I was home at quarter past six and she was fed and she goes to bed at seven so I see her for three quarters of an hour, so I feel guilty over that....It is guilt mainly. She is very happy.
>
> My mother was always at home for me and everyone else in the family was at home with their children so I always felt that I should be. But (in education)..if you give up your job for children, you won't get back in, well not at the same level. ...So, I thought when (child) is in full-time school, I would want to get a job and then I wouldn't have the holidays, so I thought if I can keep the job going...at least it would pay off later. That was the aim. But it has been a struggle until then. (Sheila)

This illustrates how making childcare more available and accessible as enshrined in current strategies will not necessarily meet the *emotional* or *moral* preferences of mothers. Sheila had no need to pay for childcare as there was considerable informal support available. She also commented on the supportive approach of her employer in letting her have time off for illness and special occasions.

Despite this support at home and at work, Sheila still felt she was missing out and she felt guilty that she went for a full day now without seeing her child. She went on to talk about how going part-time again would be of benefit:

> Obviously I can see that I can't take (child) shopping of an afternoon at a time when she is alert then. I rush in. That doesn't seem to bother her but it bothers me. I think I am missing out on, and she is missing out on, me going as a volunteer into her class. There are parents who do cooking sessions and I know from my (work in education), they are not the same as everybody else. They do know and feel at that age...Then my job side. There are times when I really need to spend an hour after (work)....., but I can't. Or not that I can't but I won't. Because my parents would be quite happy to look after (child) for another hour. So, if I worked part-time I could give that extra hour and still have more time with (child). (Sheila)

Sheila's comments reveal how guilt over both her child and her job shape her plans to go part-time. *Emotions* about childcare and work are more influential here than *practical* considerations because availability of childcare really is not a problem. This area of emotions is something that policy needs to account for if the preferences of many mothers are to be respected. In this case the option to take a long Career Break and then return to her job would have helped to resolve Sheila's dilemma. At the same time this provides another example of how 'the relations of ruling' in the spheres of paid work in education, education for her child and motherhood all work together to construct feelings of guilt. Sheila feels guilt that her own work prevented her from being a volunteer in her child's school and she knew from working in the education service that parental involvement helped the child within the social relations of schooling. There is a sense in which Sheila is caught between competing discourses and is trying to find a way of reconciling them. As someone working in education she was especially sensitive to those discourses stressing the educational role of parents. This case revealed some of the tensions that may exist between the rights of women to achieve financial independence, have a fulfilling career and show commitment to their paid work and their feelings about being there for their children in order to secure emotional and educational benefits on their behalf. The impact of discourses of 'sensitive/ intensive mothering' and the significance of 'gendered

moral rationalities' is firmly illustrated here. The strong commitment of the mothers to supporting the education of their children will be explored next.

(iii) Mothering and education: the unbearable pressure of being 'constantly creative'.

I have referred to the role that mothers play in relation to their children's schooling (Smith, 1988) and to the intensification of the parenting role with regard to children's education. As I showed in Chapter Three, this intensification is evident in policy texts produced by the state and in the expansion of parenting advice in childcare manuals, television programmes and other media. This provides a strong example of Smith's (1990b) claim that textual discourses may be especially important in guiding the social practices of mothers. Yet some textual discourses resonate more easily with mothers' gendered rationalities than others. Those that urge mothers to be involved educators fit more closely with the ideology of 'sensitive/ intensive' mothering than those that now encourage them to be paid workers competing equally with men. There is a significant literature on the relationships between mothers and the education system (David, 1993, David *et al*, 1997, Standing, 1999). As Curt Dudley-Marling argues: 'The co-ordination and supervision of children's educational activities often demands a significant portion of mothers'waking hours...' (2002: 184-185).

The extent to which mothers had accepted the expectation that they should continually find opportunities to prepare their children for school and support the work of the school directly was particularly striking. I was also alerted to the extent

to which I do this myself despite being intensely irritated by the assumptions that schools make about the availability of mothers to bake cakes, make costumes and support homework at short notice. I comply reluctantly with these demands most of the time because my children get upset when I make a fuss about it. Nevertheless, I was taken aback at the extent to which the mothers appeared to accept this role without the resentment that I feel about the schools' attempts to regulate the performance of mothering. Other sites of the state apparatus including the health service and social services also regulate the performance of mothering. In the Sure Start areas covered in my research a variety of parenting programmes were targeted mainly towards those who were perceived to be failing to parent well. The professional and textual regulation of the performance of parenting (Hays, 1996; James, 2005) discussed in Chapter One had clearly impacted strongly on the mothers. As Smith claims 'Textual realities are the ground of our contemporary consciousness of the world beyond the immediately known' (1990a: 83). This is not to claim that these texts necessarily carry a coherent message to parents or that the advice provided is unhelpful. However, it is clear that the myth that mothering is something that comes naturally and happily within the private sphere of the home does not mean that its conduct is left to chance. This would offer an explanation as to why mothers from a broad range of backgrounds and with a wide variety of experiences nevertheless seemed to be speaking a common language in regard to their perceived educational role.

When the mothers were asked about what they most enjoyed doing with their children, nearly all of them provided examples that suggested they were seeking to educate their children and do creative things with them:

> I love doing craft things with him, like a couple of weeks ago we made, you know, the shakers you can make and he loves doing things like that and I've started making a scrapbook for him with different things like photos and different receipts from outings. (Joy)

> Just being around them. Learning what they did at school. At bathtime or doing homework, just on a one to one basis. (Christine)

> Oh, and the homework. I love to teach them how to do their times table, for instance, and working with coins and making groups and making things easy for them to understand. Or like biology, how things function. They like that as well. (Greta)

These mothers represented this role as educator as an enjoyable aspect of their relationship with their children. Even where mothers had extremely busy routines or were facing significant stress in their life they would go to some length to ensure that they were able to make time for the this educational role. I will provide two examples to illustrate this point.

Diane was a white mother with one child. She had recently separated from her child's father but shared care with him. She had a degree and had tried to build a career as a freelance artist alongside low-paid work. Since the birth she had not done as much freelance work but had found a job as manager of a small business. She was able to work part-time hours, making use of a private day nursery and relying on her former partner to share the care. Nevertheless, her daily routines appeared to be very busy as she had to travel some distance to the nursery and her place of work on public transport. She described a routine in which she made a continual effort to turn mundane tasks into a creative experience for her child. Hence, the task of getting to the bus station early in the morning was described as an opportunity for play:

> So we walk over and we normally end up playing on the way over and play games, chasing, singing, shouting in the tunnel. Get a bus to creche and I normally get my lift to work then.

Diane explained that on those days when she had been in work all day that she liked to make sure that there was some space to be creative with her daughter before bed-time:

> We do painting on a Monday night unless I am very, very tired. She comes and I have it all ready for her and she comes in, has her food normally. Then we do painting. Then we clear up....Bath, bed normally and a story in bed every night.

Diane thoroughly enjoyed taking on this constantly creative role in relation to her daughter and this is conveyed further in the following extract:

> I love doing the art stuff with her. We do it a lot, we love painting. I picked up pebbles from the beach... the other day and we painted those. So we do do a lot of art work. I love jigsaws as much as she does so we do jigsaws. I love taking her to the park, anything. I love being out and about weather permitting, obviously. I just love it all.

Although, this routine is one that Diane conducted with enthusiasm, it was also one that conformed to the messages conveyed in various parenting texts such as childcare manuals and supported by the advice of health visitors and teachers. Diane's daily routines seem to resonate with textual and professional discourses and are thus linked to the 'relations of ruling' [xlvii].

In my second example, Tracey illustrates a case where the professional expectations of maternal performance are turned on their head. Tracey was disabled and was also experiencing problems with her health. She was married with two children. Her husband was in full-time work and her mother was very involved in providing

support. Nevertheless, Tracey also needed support from Social Services in relation to the care of her children. In this case Tracey felt that she had faced a battle in being allowed to be a fully involved mother. Before her eldest child started at the local school nursery, Tracey had asked her social worker if she could have some help in getting him to school and collecting him later. Her social worker had told her that someone would come and do this for her:

> I didn't like that. I wanted to be involved. I basically turned round and said to her I wanted to be involved and I wasn't going to have children for someone else to be involved. I wanted to be involved as I could be in my children's lives. And I didn't see that it was fair that because I had a disability that I should miss out on any of my children's lives. Like their first day at school.

Tracey recounted how the social worker continued to argue with her by saying that she was also a mother and had to miss out on taking her own children to school herself as she was working:

> I turned round to her and said that the difference between you and me is that you choose to miss out because you are working. I don't choose to work and so, therefore, I don't choose to miss out on my children's lives!

Tracey managed to get a referral to a different social worker willing to support her wishes by providing assistance so that Tracey could walk her child to the school. Nevertheless, Tracey had to be very assertive to achieve her wishes and to be an 'involved mother'. She went on to talk about how she was particularly worried that she would not be able to support the children in their reading and writing in later years because of her disability, once again demonstrating the significance of education as a role that mothers take responsibility for. She also felt her children missed out as other mothers at the school arranged to meet up and get their children together out of school but excluded her:

Tracey: I think I rely on people to be friendly. When the mums are meeting up with other mums.

WB: Do the mums at the school do that?

Tracey: Well, they do with each other but they don't with me. I hear them at School and they join up at clubs. There are quite a few day groups and things in this area but I can't go to them.

In this sense Tracey continues to feel that she cannot perform the role of mother in the way that she would like and that her children may suffer as a result. Her isolation is a reminder that where support networks exist there is scope for exclusion and mothering can be a very competitive activity. This chimes with the research on the role of mothers in social and emotional capital building on behalf of their children (Reay, 2005). The social isolation that Tracey felt contributed to the stress of parenting, an issue that I consider in the following section.

(d) Well being, support and stress.

Whilst childcare policy may be presented in a form that implies a desire to support parents and meet the best interests of children, it is largely driven by the interests of political economy. As an alternative, I wanted to hear what parents had to say and to evaluate policy in relation to an 'ethics of care' (F.Williams, 2001) in which the *well being* of all family members was central. I sought to illuminate what helped parents to cope, and, conversely, where stress could occur. In this section I will discuss some of the general sources of stress in the mothers' lives. In the following chapter I will return to this theme in relation to matters concerning formal childcare.

Whilst many mothers were reluctant to talk directly about the difficulties of working and caring, some of the stresses involved did emerge during our discussion. One common 'low-level' source of frustration for mothers was not having sufficient time to manage everything properly, to enjoy family life or to do their paid work to the standard that they would like:

> It really bothers me, I have never been that much of a tidy person but as I am getting older I just want to be more organised and want things to run smoothly. And I find that I do struggle to get all the household bits done and work full-time and study. (Janet)

> I do feel that, perhaps, if I didn't have the children that I would come home every day and feel that I had done a better day's work. Now I feel, all of a sudden I will realise it is time to go, I will run out of the office and my desk is in a mess and I don't feel that I have got as much accomplished as I would before. (Lowri)

However, in addition to this general feeling of being under pressure some mothers identified deeper problems in coping with crises and facing social isolation and loneliness.

(i) Coping with crises

Mothers pointed out that their routines were so tight that it was difficult to cope if anything upset the balance. The illness of either children or themselves was a particular difficulty. Lowri, for example, was a single parent who worked full-time. Although she shared care with the children's father, the school would always ring her if either child were taken ill. Although she was in a senior position and her line manager would understand if she had to leave work to collect a sick child, some of her colleagues were resentful: 'Everybody just sees it as an excuse to go early and stuff. You get stressed about going as well as what you are doing' (Lowri).

Because Lowri did not have any extended family available to care for her children, she had no choice but to take time off work despite feeling enormous guilt over this. In contrast Diane also pointed out that illness could be a problem but that she was able to rely on her mother for support in emergencies:

> I think I find looking after (child) really difficult if I am not well or if I am very tired. Obviously I have got less patience then. I was very ill last weekend and I phoned my mum.....And I said, oh, mum, please and she said bring (child) round and I will have (child) tomorrow as well.

The issue of dealing with sickness was discussed in all the interviews with mothers. Many of the mothers who were in paid work relied on other family members to offer support where children went sick once again illustrating the connections between access to social capital and the ability to manage childcare and paid work. Others had changed their paid work so that there would always be someone available at home should illness occur. Where both parents worked or mothers had sole responsibility for their children and there was no informal care available, they were reliant on having an understanding employer. In the majority of cases the mother said that it would be she rather than the father who would take time off work for emergencies. Hence some mothers expressed gratitude where they had an understanding employer rather than seeing time off to care as something they should be entitled to as an employment right:

> ...because of (husband's) job. He is the ...manager. He is not in a position, really, not to go in to work. He has not got the flexibility that I have got. I can ring in and say that I have got a problem with childcare and they are quite accommodating. (Gillian)

> I have never felt bad, if the children, when (child) was ill, they didn't make me feel bad at all about having to have time off. Because I felt bad, but I also felt bad for (child) but they didn't put any pressure on me at all. (Kelly)

Where mothers perceived that their employer would not be understanding about illness this was a source of stress:

> I do not feel confident to say that I am off for my (child). I say it is me who is not well, I lie, because I feel if I say that I am off for my (child), then, I do not know how understanding they are. (Natalie)

Natalie had been on a teacher education course and had been advised by her tutor to tell her placement school that she was unwell rather than admit that her child was ill. Greta who was a nursing student felt that tutors were completely unsympathetic to those students with childcare responsibilities in relation to illness or in arranging placements. Family friendly employment policies and rights for parental leave can help mitigate these stresses but these were not the norm for most mothers. Coping with any change to busy routines can create stress and where informal support is available this makes a considerable difference, thus illustrating the value of access to social capital in the management of childcare.

(ii) Social Isolation and Loneliness

Some mothers were facing significant problems of stress, appeared to be finding it hard to cope or seemed to be depressed. I have referred to **Tracey**, who as a disabled mother felt that she had to fight for certain rights of recognition in her contact with her social worker. Whilst she had been successful in claiming resources to help her manage her disability and care for her children, she had to be assertive in insisting these resources were provided in a way that would enable her to maintain maximum involvement in her children's care. Yet despite winning her battle to be assisted in

taking her children to school herself she felt excluded from local mothering networks that centered on the school. Her mother was present at the interview and she was regularly involved in supporting her daughter, possibly helping to counter some of the isolation that Tracey felt. In addition Tracey had been successful in getting social services to provide support in a way that would suit her needs.

Joy had also mentioned that she had suffered from depression following the birth of her son. Her health visitor had identified this:

> (child) had his hearing test when he was about seven or eight months and the health visitor could see that I was getting a bit down. I was just stuck in all day with (child) and she said why don't you try the Centre and see what is on over there. So I phoned them that day just after she had gone and it just happened to be the Tuesday when drop-in centre was there, and it was pouring with rain, but I put (child) in the buggy and I went straight over and that was over a year ago now.

Joy clearly benefited considerably from the availability of a local centre for parents that offered different activities every day and a creche for parents attending classes. The availability of a facility that can help provide respite, parenting advice and somewhere to meet other parents was essential for helping Joy overcome her depression. In addition she commented on the support that she received from her family including her mother (who was present during the interview). As she was unable to drive and she found taking a child on public transport very difficult she was reliant on her husband and other family members to take her out.

Sally was a single parent with one child. She explained that she had experienced health problems since she was sixteeen years old involving a period in hospital. She was supported by a community nurse and attended a day centre for people with

health problems. She was currently undertaking some work experience at the day centre:

> They give people a chance who go there as clients to work in the office if they think they can cope with it. Because it gives us something to do rather than staying in the house all the time or just doing things in the Day Centre.

During this work experience Sally was able use a local creche that was paid for by the Day Centre. In addition she was paying for her child to attend on one other day from her own finances. She was very open about the difficulties of being with a child all day:

> Sometimes I don't like it when I am on my own all day and all night with (child). It is just me and (child) and I hate that when I don't see anybody. I take (child) out for a walk but sometimes there are not many places that (child) wants to go with me. And I find it hard when (child) is ill....and I am here on my own. I find that hard.

Sally commented on feeling constantly tired and that she was too tired to have a social life of her own. She also felt that she would find it hard to manage working more than one day per week because of all the demands of childcare:

> I couldn't work full-time. I would be much too tired and I don't think I could cope. And I do find it hard even working one day a week. You know, taking (child) to the creche and stuff. It is a long time to be left really because somebody else picks (child) up for me...and then I don't get to see (child) until about half five, so it is like a long day for (child). *I don't think anyone else can give the care for (child) that I do*..... I find it hard like going to work. Previously I worked two days a week and I found that really hard as well. And when you get home from work as well you are exhausted and then they haven't seen you all day. And then they have got to have their tea and everything is on top of you, like. (my emphasis)

The feelings expressed by Sally here resonated with my own feelings about the stresses involved in combining childcare and paid work. What had surprised me was that so few of the other mothers had expressed similar feelings.

Rashida, a Bangladeshi mother who was married with one child, described herself as a full-time housewife. She lived with her husband who was a full-time waiter working nights. She was pregnant with her second child at the time of interview. Rashida seemed to be very depressed and frustrated with her current situation. Although her husband had family living locally, she felt isolated because her own family lived in another City. She had worked for a national company in her home City and had been able to transfer to their Swansea store when she moved. She had given up work with her first pregnancy and expressed some frustration over this:

> But the thing is that I have always been independent and now I think that I have lost my freedom completely. It took me a while, actually, to come round that. You know I have no freedom in a sense like something to do with my (child). I mean I don't mind the love, obviously you adore your children. You put them first. And now I am expecting again and that doesn't make it any easier. Obviously now again I will have to wait another year or so. I daren't even think of going back to work.

Rashida held strong views about not using formal childcare and stressed that she had no family who could provide any support, commenting 'I can't see myself leaving my child with a stranger. If it was family, I can, but I couldn't do it'. Nevertheless, Rashida was sure that she would return to part-time, paid work once her children were in school. She seemed to see having children as a duty to be endured, saying 'I want to get them over and done so that I can get my life back'.

Throughout the interview Rashida would move from stressing how much she loved her child who she described as 'really good' and 'a quiet child' to expressing her loneliness and isolation:

> (Child) used to cry a little bit and I used to be really upset. But it is not to do with (child), I just get emotional for some reason. And then I think why am I crying but there is no answer. It is probably because things get on top of me and maybe I am homesick. Sitting by myself, day in and day out, seven days a week, just me and my (child) when my husband goes to work.

> Yes. And then we are surrounded by his family, not mine, they are not my friends. So it is not really...You know there is stuff I do with (child) but then again there is not much to do here. I can't drive and that is the disadvantage. If I could drive, I could go to the swimming pool, do more stuff with (child) and so my day would have gone and my evenings wouldn't seem long as they do now.

Rashida's isolation was due to variety of factors. Her husband worked night shifts, she had no paid work and no family or friends living locally. She felt strongly that her husband's family was seeking to control her rather than support her. She was angry that they had asked her to give up driving lessons during her first pregnancy in case it harmed the baby and now she was left unable to drive in a City that lacked the transport links she was used to in her home City. Her dissatisfaction was palpable:

> As I said, I will eventually get a job. I always had that in my mind. Maybe that is why I am more determined once I have had kids to go out. Some people are happy, don't get me wrong, once they have kids and they're a housewife, they don't mind it, but it is just not me. I can't see myself just doing that for the rest of my life. I just need to get out of the house and do something for myself.

Whilst, for some of the mothers, support from local family and community networks was a source of strength, for Rashida, this was not the case. She talked about feeling under scrutiny with people 'poking their nose' into her business and said 'As I said I am from (home City) and people have no time and don't care who is doing what....Here you just feel people have no lives'.

In these examples the mothers expressed hardship in relation to loneliness and isolation. A significant factor was that none of them were able to drive, exacerbating their reliance on a poor public transport system or wider family to get around with young children. Apart from Rashida, all had been able to get some support, either from family (Tracey, Joy) and/or through local services (Tracey, Joy, Sally). I shall be discussing the role of local services for parents and children in the following chapter.

(iii) Mothering and informal care

The availability of informal care provided by wider family or by friends and neighbours can be significant in helping mothers cope with stress. Conversely, mothers such as Rashida who lack access to trusted informal support may feel especially vulnerable. Access to social and emotional capital can mitigate the stresses of childcare. When I asked mothers whether they felt that there was anything different about how they managed care when compared to others, those that did not benefit from informal care referred to it as a factor:

> I guess it is unique in that I am single and I am a foreigner.....Because she goes to school in (area of Swansea), people are very close to their relatives and often they have got a sister or mum living around. I don't have that. I miss that really. (Danielle)

> Obviously, being a foreigner I have no family so I have to rely more on my friends whereas here they have got more mothers or grandparents that can help and maybe you don't feel so...how can I say...gosh I cannot find the word. You know when you are related the demand maybe isn't so strong as if it is a friend who is just a mother of a friend of your child. It is not so close and maybe you cannot impose on them so much either. So maybe more embarrassing sometimes to ask for help. (Natalie)

> ...I guess it is surprising just how many people can rely on family completely, you know, there seems to be an awful lot of people who do have their children taken to and from school every day!.....I have got a couple of girls at work after having babies and their mothers, you know, have got their babies permanently. (Lowri)

In order to demonstrate the significance of informal care for mothers I will compare the circumstances of two of the Bangladeshi mothers, **Zeena** and **Farah**. Both mothers were engaged in paid work and, for different and confidential reasons, neither was able to rely on income from the father of their children.

Zeena

Zeena lived with her extended family. She had one child. She worked part-time for the Health Service. Zeena was very satisfied with her current situation. She emphasized the strong support that she received from her family in relation to the care of her child and acknowledged that this enabled her to do a job that she really enjoyed. When I asked her how the birth had impacted on her life, she responded:

> Well, it hasn't really affected my life because I have got my family to help me. Because my mum and my sisters have always helped me to look after (child) so I haven't actually stopped working. I used to work in my dad's (business) before that. So it is just helping each other.

Zeena argued that without family help she would adapt her working hours rather than make use of formal childcare:

> That is the good thing about having family to help, you see. You don't worry, you know they will take care of your children properly, you know. Whereas if it was somebody else then you would really have to know the person well before you could trust them to look after your child properly. I think so anyway and I have never left (child) with any strangers and I don't think I could either.

> If it came to the fact that I had to leave (child) with strangers I think I would give up work.

Zeena also thought this was a particular issue within the Bangladeshi community in that 'It is not expected for a mother to leave her children to go to work and leave the children with strangers. It is not done' (Zeena). This distrust of formal childcare was fairly common in my interviews and was expressed by some mothers from different social class and ethnic backgrounds. Whilst a number of workers with the Bangladeshi community and Bangladeshi mothers themselves stressed family based childcare as a *community* preference, my research indicated that this view is more widely held and links with the wider ideology of 'sensitive/ intensive mothering' that cuts across class and ethnicity. In other words, the 'gendered moral rationalities' expressed by Bangladeshi mothers were very similar to those expressed by many of the white mothers in this area of Wales. The distrust of formal childcare is an issue that is known to policy-makers (WAG, CWG, 2005a) and I shall return to it in the next chapter.

Zeena appeared to have a very strong commitment to paid work, commenting that she had worked in her father's business until the day before the birth. She was also very enthusiastic about Government 'welfare-to-work' schemes:

> I think it is good, it is really good because rather than being stuck at home feeling sorry for yourself. Going out to work, getting a chance. Because some people never got a chance because some people get married early or some people get pregnant or something like that and they don't get an opportunity to do what they wanted to do. So getting another chance, I think is really good. It is like me as well. I didn't get a chance to take my education further and now I am getting the chance so I am really grateful for that. (Zeena)

Zeena occupied an interesting position in relation to discursive frames around childcare. I have argued that the framing of childcare as a passport to paid work may

be in tension with the ideology of 'sensitive/ intensive mothering' and gendered moral rationalities. Zeena supported the trend for mothers to return to paid work and had accepted the way this was framed in New Deal initiatives as relating to 'getting a chance', as being about individual mobility rather than economic need. However, she held strong feelings that she would never use formal childcare under any circumstances. She would put her child's needs before her devotion to her work if her family could not help her. In her case she was able to reconcile the tensions because of her access to social capital. She was aware that she was able to avoid the stresses faced by many working mothers in that her mother carried out most of the domestic labour while she was at work and they all helped each other in the evenings. Zeena said she was happy with her circumstances 'because going to work gives me a bit of free time. Like it is my time. It just gives me a bit of freedom rather than staying at home and doing the housework' (Zeena). Zeena's well being was enhanced by the degree to which she could rely on her family to provide support. The achievement of independence, personal well-being and role equity for some mothers is secured on the basis of gendered social networks of support in which an older generation of women continue to do the unpaid care. Clearly, Zeena was in a very different position to working mothers who have the housework to conduct once their paid work is finished, as illustrated in the next case.

Farah:

Farah was married, living with her husband and two children. She worked part-time in the education service and the family were dependent on her income. Farah had wider family living close by in the area but took main responsibility for caring for

her children and for domestic labour. She had one child in half-day school nursery and another who was cared for by his father until Farah returned from work. In the past she had made use of formal childcare through a private day nursery but found that it was too expensive. Farah had been working full-time but had been able to cut down to part-time working once she received some advice about the Working Tax Credit. She stressed that this had been 'a life-saver' for her as she had been so stressed out attempting to undertake full-time work with two small children.

Whilst Farah felt that the transition to part-time work had been positive, she still made frequent references to the stress of managing work and childcare:

> I would love someone, if someone could take (*child*) to school so that, the morning, I am driving like a maniac to get to my work and the traffic is terrible then. So that is the only reason why I get out at quarter past eight and park my car in such a way that I can just leave (child), drop (child) off and then just rush back and still I am late.

Although the school ran a breakfast club, Farah felt that her child was too young to be left there. This was a common attitude amongst the mothers, that they would not make use of formal facilities that would relieve their stress if this was felt not to be in the best interests of the child. The pressures of this responsibility was mentioned throughout the interview, although Farah loved her job and wanted to work and hoped to undertake further study or training once this was possible.

If we consider Farah's position in relation to the discursive frames in childcare policy, it is clear that she is a mother who wished to undertake paid work and had also gained from the opportunity to work shorter hours as a result of the Tax Credit System. Contrary to popular views about the attitudes and circumstances of mothers

in the local Bangladeshi community she was willing to use formal childcare, did not feel that she could make too many demands on her wider family for support and was the sole breadwinner. The local childcare market was failing her in many ways. In addition to the high costs of private childcare, Farah also commented on the lack of flexibility:

> All these formal childcare venues, I find them very formal. You either put your child in for a time or not. Part-time has to be two or three days, they won't do less than that. Otherwise you are taking up space for another child. Or they won't do one or two hours a day, anything like that.

In this situation, it is possible to see that for those mothers lacking support from family and willing to use formal childcare, that current services did not meet all their needs or protect them from the stresses of combining paid work and care. It is these gaps in the formal childcare system that tend to be plugged where possible by wider family, especially grandmothers.

Two grandmothers agreed to be interviewed and both were involved in the regular care of grandchildren. **Mavis** was retired with three adult children. She was currently caring for her two year-old grandchild on a full-time basis as her daughter was unwell. Whilst she was committed to doing this and talked about the joy of spending time with her grandchild, Mavis also admitted that it was a strain:

> Well, it is a bit of a tie. I feel a little one of that age needs younger parents. Once (daughter) is well she will go back to her mum but we are always here as support. I think it is the length of the day, but of course (husband and grandfather) is home a lot now…He is good with her. She is not sleeping in the day very much at all now. He used to walk her up and down the drive so she would go off to sleep and we would have an hour or two off…..But he finds it hard, it is not like when you were younger and you had got the energy to do it.

The other grandmother, Jackie, was also in the position of having a grandchild living with her. However, in this case her daughter was also at home, having recently separated from her partner. Jackie also had another daughter living locally with two children. All three children attended the local school. Both daughters were in paid work meaning that Jackie was involved in looking after all of her grandchildren. In addition Jackie's husband took an active part in their care and in collecting the children from school. Jackie explained that she had health problems meaning that her husband had to do most of the domestic chores. The whole family had devised a routine for working together in order to ensure any gaps in childcare were filled. In addition to caring for her grandchildren, Jackie took some responsibility for liaison with the school where necessary and supporting homework projects. Jackie said that she felt that it was good for mothers to return to paid work and that it was good for the children to be cared for by others:

> Because sometimes it is not good to be with the kids all the time. They don't learn how other people, you know, not all the people are the same so they learn to fit in as well.

These two grandmothers were not necessarily typical given the significant degree of support that they were providing. However, they did demonstrate the value of mothers having somewhere to turn in situations of crisis. In the case of Mavis and her husband, they were there when her daughter became seriously ill. Similarly, Jackie and her husband were able to help following the breakdown of a relationship in addition to the support that they had always provided. Although the grandmothers seemed to take the lead in organising care they were also reliant on the grandfathers to be able to cope with this. In the final section I discuss childcare from the perspective of the fathers.

SECTION TWO: FATHERS' PERSPECTIVES ON CARE.

There is a growing literature on the social conditions of fatherhood (Hatten *et al*, 2002; O'Brien, 2005; O'Brien and Shemilt, 2003). Fathers were invited to volunteer for interview and I was able to conduct interviews with six fathers. I also conducted a group interview with some fathers who were involved in a Sure Start project. Three of these fathers subsequently volunteered to give individual interviews and are included in the sample of six. Although this is a small group and I shall not attempt to generalise from these accounts, the fathers who volunteered were in a wide variety of personal and material circumstances. Their details are given in Appendix 3.

There are three issues that I will consider here. First, what did the fathers have to say about balancing work and care? Second, were there any specific issues relating to the social conditions of fatherhood that concerned them? Third, what understandings did the men have of being a 'good' father? Did this conform to or challenge dominant discourses concerning the role of fathers?

(a) *Paid Work and Fatherhood*

Malcolm was the only father who felt that fatherhood had a significant impact on his paid work. However, in contrast to some of the mothers, this did not mean that he had changed his job or reduced his hours. Nevertheless, he did feel that he now had less flexibility in relation to work:

> Again it had a big impact on my work because I had to keep more rigid hours and things like when the team went to the pub after work, I couldn't go because I had to pick (child) up.
>
> Also there is the responsibility as well if family is ill during the day, I have got to go…..And then you have got to go home and you don't have much of a choice really.

Malcolm explained that because his duties included 'frontline' work with students, it was not possible for him to work flexibly or from home, meaning that if his child was ill, it could cause real problems:

> …some aspects of the work can be covered but there isn't anyone who can do my job when I am not around. There will be significant parts of my job that will pile up.

Given that there was no family support available it meant that Malcolm and his wife had to share and arrange cover between them in a crisis.

In contrast **Kenneth**, who was also in full-time professional work and whose partner worked full-time, expressed less anxieties about meeting the demands of paid work alongside care. He talked about the benefits of having a child at a time when he was well established in his career in a senior management position:

> For me it has come at a time when I have reached the point in my career where I don't want to go anywhere else. I wouldn't say that I am winding down but even before the addition to the family I was at the point where I would rarely take work home anyway. So the impact has been less on me than might be expected. So there is not really a conflict between work and non-work.

With regard to the problem of a child falling ill, again, he seemed to feel less concerned that this would affect his work. This was helped by the fact that both parents worked in jobs with flexible working conditions:

> Well, one of you does have to drop something and it depends on the degree of illness. If one of the kids has got a sore throat or a headache then they may well come in and sit in one of our offices quietly and read. And that is very easy as well in both our places of work. Whereas if they have got a stomach upset or they are really quite poorly then it comes down to who has something on during the day or who has least on or boxing and coxing again.

Both **Michael** (club doorman) and **Leo** (security officer) were also in paid work. Michael said that he did not think there was any conflict between his paid work and his role as a carer. He had been in post prior to becoming a father and he felt that as his working hours started after his children's bedtime that there was no difficulty. His mother was available to care for his children. He pointed out that work was very important to him and that he didn't wish to live on benefits:

> ..but there are some arseholes out there who don't want to work at all. If they want to be dole bums then let them be dole bums.

In this sense Michael articulated the discourses related to 'welfare to work' and 'hard working families' and yet challenged common stereotypes in relation to fatherhood as the main carer for his children. Nevertheless, he relied on the support of his mother in order to be able to achieve a balance between paid work and involvement as a father.

Leo had regular contact with his non-resident children including having them to stay with him overnight. However, he stressed that their visits had to be arranged to fit in with his work: "When I am working I haven't got the children. That is one thing that I cannot do. I have the children when I am not working."

Patrick had been in full-time work until his wife had become ill and he had taken on a full-time care role. When asked about his feelings about paid work he said:

> It is not an issue for me. I can't say what the next six months will be like, or twelve months. I just don't know. But I want to try to get back into some kind of work…

However, he did not feel that this was possible at present given the demands of caring alone for three children: "looking after myself and three children is a full-time job".

Aalam was currently studying as well as doing voluntary work for a community organisation. As his wife was not working and he had a lot of informal support from family, there was no conflict between childcare responsibilities and these other activities. However, he did talk about how busy he was:

> I would like it if there were thirty six hours in a day!! But it is demanding because to get a job that pays you well you need some kind of qualification. I worked in my own business for eight to ten years and decided to go back into University to get some kind of degree. At a time when one is thirty, I think it is a very tough decision to stop doing something and start doing something new again. But it is challenging.

Overall, the fathers in my sample held varied positions in relation to their balance between paid work and care. However, none of them could be described as occupying a traditional position as sole breadwinner. These were fathers who were either seeking to share care in an egalitarian way (Malcolm, Kenneth); were caring for children on either a full-time or shared basis apart from the mother (Patrick, Michael, Leo) or arranged childcare within an extended family (Aalam). It is significant that the men who were interested enough and available to volunteer to be interviewed were those who challenged the 'home-maker-breadwinner contract'.

(b) ***The Social Conditions of Fatherhood: dominant discourses and an alternative.***

The fathers were invited to comment on what roles and responsibilities they felt were expected of fathers, whether they felt that gender roles were changing and whether they felt able to be fathers in a way that suited them. There seemed to be a split in their views which reflected the split between men in full-time professional positions living with partners and the men whom I recruited through the Sure Start project who were coping in difficult conditions.

Some of the men turned immediately to issues of paid work in their response. Kenneth and Malcolm both referred to the introduction of family friendly employment policies and acknowledged that these were not always implemented effectively. Kenneth suggested that it was easier for him to refuse to attend an evening meeting because he had to collect a child from nursery on account of his seniority and long service in the institution. However, he felt that this would be less easy for parents at earlier stages in their career. Malcolm said that the question of paternal leave had been an issue for him:

> Parental legislation has come out and employers have not reacted terribly pro-actively to the legislation changing. Policies on paternal leave are still being sorted out and that is one of the problems for me. Because (child) was born before the paternal leave rights came into effect and it is a big issue for me as I lost a lot of annual leave over that period.

Malcolm felt that more needed to be done in the workplace to support parents:

> I would like to see a more structured approach and a more open approach within organisations....I think that would be a great help to working parents.

He went on to argue that, within his own institution, although policies were in place, that it was well known that they were implemented in a variable way across departments:

> I think one of the frustrating things is that it is happening in some Departments, particularly where they have got a line manager who understands where employees are coming from on these issues and it is perhaps slower in others....

The issue of family friendly working practices will be considered in more detail in the next chapter. The men in professional positions focused on workplace issues revealing how work remained central to their identity. Being able to 'father well' will be based on achieving rights at work rather than by accommodating the workplace in the way many of the mothers had done. With regard to the textual relations of ruling (Smith, 1990b), it was significant that the men in professional occupations turned to the discourse of 'family-friendly' employment rights to reflect on their role as fathers rather than, for example, beginning with a discussion of the distribution of care at home. Social policy frames its support for fathers mainly in relation to helping them balance their work and home life. Presumably a more equal distribution of care at home is assumed to follow from this but this cannot be taken for granted.

The other main discourse drawn on to discuss the changing nature of fatherhood was with regard to debates over custody. This was an issue for many of the fathers that I met at my group interview at a Sure Start project. The project worker explained that the project tried to provide support for fathers over issues of access and custody following a relationship breakdown. Many of the men felt that fathers received unfair treatment in this regard. The following comment that was expressed by Patrick in our individual interview seemed to reflect the views of several fathers:

> ..when it comes to separation, it is seventy five percent the mother's position and twenty five percent the father's position and their rights are just thrown out of the window and it should be level all the way through.

The project worker stressed the project was to provide support rather than to campaign:

> We don't want to be seen to be waving banners and all that but there is an organisation called Fathers for Justice who are very active. We are doing our bit by being hands-on fathers and showing an interest in our children.

The men also felt that social attitudes towards those fathers that were taking a primary caring role made things difficult for them. This included day-to-day activities such as doing the school pick-up:

> But after a time the teachers and parents get used to you. But for a lot of fathers it is difficult to get past that point because for the first couple of weeks people are giving you strange looks or acting strangely towards you, then you think, oh, I am not doing that again. (Project worker, Sure Start Interview)

> I have found that. Because I am a single father with three children, and there are a lot of single mothers with a couple of children in the school and then there might be the odd fathers who are standing on their own. (Patrick in Group Interview)

The fathers also mentioned that contact with a Doctor or Health Visitor could be frustrating, as they would assume that the mother was the primary carer as Michael illustrated:

> It does my head in now but I have just learned to live with it. I take them to the Doctors now and they say, where is the mother, and I say that the mother has got nothing to do with it, she is not allowed to see her. It is me who has got them now, not the mother.

The men involved with Sure Start all spoke of the valuable role that the project played in supporting them:

> ..it gets you out of the house and you get to meet people. Otherwise my life would just be working and looking after the children. Coming here takes me away from that routine. (Leo)
>
> It is not to isolate yourself from society but to come and talk and play football and pool, open yourself up a bit more than you would if you were just indoors isolated from society and you don't know where to turn....You have a target to go to and then you feel better at the end of the day. (Patrick)

These fathers were distinct in that they were attending a support group for fathers that addressed the social conditions of fatherhood for men facing specific challenges or trying to care for children alone. Hence, they were able to reflect on some of the problems that fathers may face in terms of wider questions of social prejudice, professional attitudes to fathers and the need for help in coping with care. This is a model that needs to be expanded beyond those fathers who are identified as being 'at risk'. *All* fathers could benefit from these issues being aired and addressed in family and childcare policy.

(c) Hands-on fathering? Discussing care, joy and emotions.

The project worker who stressed the value of being a 'hands-on dad' seemed to speak to what all the fathers were trying to achieve. In talking about their care routines and their time spent with their children all of the fathers described a very active role. Here I will present two examples to demonstrate some common themes.

Michael emphasised that although his mother provided some support he saw care of the children as his responsibility. He talked about how becoming a father had changed his life for the better:

> Oh, it has changed one hell of a lot. I used to drink.....but once I had the baby then, I stopped. I don't drink, I don't go out, I don't smoke, I don't do nothing. The only thing that I do now is kick boxing and my children and my work. That is all there is. I have got more sense!
>
> I will do just anything for my (children). They are my life. If I didn't have them I don't know what I would do.

Michael talked about his routines in a positive way. I asked him if he found it hard given that his children were so young:

> No. With this one, when she has her bottle, that is her, she is gone, she's sleeping. With the one over there, she always cries to go to bed at half-past seven and that's her. She will be in bed for about ten minutes, watch Stuart Little, she loves and that is her, she is gone.
>
> Bathtime is probably the hardest. She has her bath first and my mum takes her downstairs then and I bath my little one then. That is the only part that I find hard. The rest is easy. And I have read all the books and everything.

Michael speaks of his deep involvement in the care of his children and his enjoyment of it. He speaks of the 'hands-on' nature of his role. He also talked about keeping his children safe, expressing worries about drink and drugs:

> I don't want the children to see all of that. I want them to have a good childhood. I didn't have one. I want my children to have a better childhood than I did.

Anxieties over child safety were also expressed by some of the other fathers in common with some of the mothers, a theme uncovered in other research (Mumford and Power, 2003). Michael challenged stereotypes that the mother best conducts these roles in nurturing and protecting children. As the primary carer there seemed to

be no difference between the way he reflected on the caring role and the way the mothers did. His comment that he had 'read all the books' seems significant, for as the sole carer he was engaging with those textual discourses that were so powerful for the social practices of the mothers.

Malcolm described an egalitarian distribution of domestic labour and childcare. As both he and his wife were in full-time professional posts, it was felt that this should be shared. In talking about what he most enjoyed about his fathering role he said:

> I suppose it is the reading at the end of the day, it is quality time that I ring-fence with (child). It is having the opportunity to play at weekends as well. Again that time is generally ring-fenced. I think you have to be quite structured and quite disciplined in what you do to ensure (child) gets quality time.

Throughout the interview Malcolm returned to this notion of being disciplined suggesting that being a 'hands-on' father could easily be eroded through work commitments. In the following extract Malcolm was talking about coping when his child was misbehaving:

> You just take the rough with the smooth. Children test the boundaries and that is just something that you have to live with. I suppose it is being disciplined and taking a deep breath and not to draw the frustration that you have got in your life, you know, if you have had a bad day in work and (child) goes and does something wrong..

Malcolm also spoke about how work would spill over into the weekend for both himself and his wife leading to further negotiation over sharing the care.

All of the fathers took an active role in the care of their children. In Aalam's case he admitted that he had not been very involved at first but that this had changed:

> I found out that if I wasn't interested then the mother was slack. So later on I found that the more time that I put in then my wife is even better at it than me. So I decided to join in because the children need both parents, actually. They need mum and dad.

Hence, the experience of fatherhood had changed him from holding traditional views to taking on a more involved role in which care was shared.

These accounts demonstrate that many fathers do want to care and would benefit from policies that will ensure they have the time and support to do so.

CONCLUSION: IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY

Childcare policies celebrate the principles of equality, justice, the best interests of children and parental choice (HM Treasury, 2004; WAG, 2005e). However, the mothers' and fathers' accounts reveal both diversity and inequalities in caring practices and some common concerns that reveal deep gaps in current childcare policy. Mothers and fathers expressed a variety of standpoints on how they wished to manage care and how far they felt they were exercising a choice in this matter. Perceptions of what represents an egalitarian or fair model of care and domestic labour are highly subjective and variable. My intention was to explore what worked to the apparent satisfaction of the mothers rather than to impose my own values. Nevertheless, the mothers' accounts support other research on the existence of a gendered moral economy of care (Duncan and Edwards, 1999; McDowell *et al*, 2005; Williams, 2004b) and this raises issues for feminists wishing to see a redistribution of domestic and emotional labour. Gendered moral rationalities may celebrate the role of mothers in providing care and yet also take this for granted. This

means there is an incomplete cultural *recognition* of the social and economic contribution of domestic labour and the inequalities that result from this. In turn gendered moral rationalities mean that the value of redistributing care between women and men will not be recognised and policies that seek to achieve this could be resisted. Many women value being with their children, feel they have a *moral* duty to be there for them and do everything they can to make paid work fit around this. Fathers have a different relationship to paid work but may develop strategies to ensure they can be more involved in the care of their children. The mothers' reflections resonated with the model of the 'sensitive/ intensive' mother (Walkerdine and Lucey, 1989; Hays, 1996), putting her child first and giving priority to their emotional needs and educational development. This cut across differences of geographical location, family circumstances, social class and ethnicity. Although mothers' material circumstances and child care arrangements varied, these arrangements were justified with reference to these 'moral codes'. Consequently gender divisions persist and often become more entrenched as a result of the transition to motherhood. In this sense motherhood is tied up with deep-seated cultural and economic injustices.

These accounts also reveal factors that contribute to the well being of mothers, fathers and children or, conversely, contribute to stress and difficulties. The availability of *informal care* and *social networks of support* were particularly important and, yet again, reinforce gender divisions and the unpaid contribution of women to the economy and education systems (Smith, 1988). The accounts revealed the important role of unpaid care at home, conducted mainly by mothers and by female relatives, especially grandmothers (Gray, 2005; Wheelock and Jones, 2002),

indicating the significance of gendered social and emotional capital (Edwards and Gillies, 2005; Reay, 2000; 2005) for childcare arrangements. In order for many mothers to be able to work and be willing to work, the informal care sector is essential. It is through access to informal care that many mothers negotiate the tensions between different ideologies in terms of the work ethic, the intensification of parental responsibilities and remaining true to the principles of 'sensitive mothering'. This will be illustrated further in the next chapter.

These accounts suggest both childcare and gender equality policies need to take into account the interactions between paid employment, caring and domestic labour in women's and men's lives. Where parents have access to 'family-friendly' employment packages such as that described by Becky this enhances their control over their choices following parenthood. The experiences of many of the parents showed there is a lot more to be done here. Many of the priorities of childcare policy and gender mainstreaming around employment rights are, therefore, to be welcomed. However, how mothers and fathers *feel about* caring for children and the role they play in meeting the needs of children has been given insufficient attention in current childcare and gender equality policies. At the same time, the intensification of the parenting role (Gillies, 2005) fits with how mothers interpret their responsibilities in relation to emotional and educational care. Certain strands of social policy may thus be *reinforcing* gender inequalities and the pressures mothers face whilst simultaneously exhorting mothers to do paid work.

Connell (1990) identifies the structure of cathexis, the gendered nature of emotional attachments as one structure that makes up the 'gender regime'. This is crucial for

understanding the persisting role of women as primary carers and the ideologies that support this. The accounts discussed here show this forcefully and support other research around this issue (Duncan and Edwards, 1999; Barlow, Duncan and James, 2002). Unfortunately, family and childcare policy has not engaged with this issue and, according to Barlow, Duncan and James (2002) New Labour has made both a 'rationality' and 'morality' mistake in the process. Claims by both the UK and the Welsh Assembly Governments that childcare policy is designed to advance gender equality seem cynical and rhetorical in the absence of any engagement with these issues. There is a sufficient research and information base available for policy to embrace a more sophisticated understanding of the connections between childcare, paid work and gender. Liberal feminist efforts to provide women with access to paid work seem likely to benefit middle class women in professional occupations especially. Yet we have long been aware of the limits to this agenda which does little to challenge the gender order or the class biased nature of liberal welfare regimes.

Childcare relations thus lie at the heart of both political economy and the moral economy of care and this deserves attention from a feminist standpoint. Dorothy Smith argues:

> ...what is commonly known in political economy as 'the capitalist mode of production' is constituted as an internally driven sphere of dynamic relations mediated by money and commodities. Subsistence enters this sphere only insofar as it is given economic presence by the uses of the wage to buy commodities and hence also as 'consumption'. *The other dimensions of household work and of child-rearing, on which feminist political economists have insisted, don't become visible.* (1999: 38, my emphasis)

Smith claims that ruling relations embedded in work, government and economy have sidelined family and childcare issues. Whilst the focus by New Labour on family and

childcare policy (DfEE, 1998; HM Treasury 2004) might lead some to challenge Smith's claim, my view is that her claims hold true in that unpaid care and domestic labour continue to be invisible. The emergence of new forms of family, parenting and childcare policy support an economic logic that still sidelines the value of care whilst simultaneously placing further pressures on those that do the care to 'parent well'. Policy seeks to plug gaps in the economy, not to relieve mothers or fathers of the stresses that they face, to redistribute domestic labour or to offer universal access to support. The parents' accounts have demonstrated this forcefully.

CHAPTER SEVEN

SUPPORTING PARENTS? PROVIDING SUPPORT AND MEETING NEEDS IN CHILDCARE AND EARLY YEARS SERVICES.

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I turn to parents' perspectives on and relationship with local childcare and early years services. In a recent study of 'quality' in early years services in an English local authority, Emily Tanner, Elaine Welsh and Jane Lewis argue that different stakeholders will interpret quality in competing ways. They argue:

> The inclusionary approach to quality definition, in which all stakeholders are involved in defining quality... requires the involvement of parents as perhaps *the* most important stakeholder group in early years services. (2006: 13)

The research in Swansea has been conducted with this viewpoint in mind. Like the local EYDCP in Tanner *et al's* study, there are no parent representatives on Swansea EYDCP. There is considerable interest in Swansea and across Wales in encouraging the participation of children and young people in the policy-making process, yet the value of parental involvement has only recently been given attention (WAG, 2005g).

Childcare policy has encouraged the development of childcare services to enable parents to access paid work and, in socially deprived areas, to provide socialising experiences for pre-school children (Glass, 1999; Millar, 2003). The scope and limits to childcare policy framed in these terms have been debated in Chapters Three and Four. In this chapter I explore the parents' experience of the formal childcare and

early years system in relation to the issues of *support*, *choice* and *need* rather than solely with regard to labour market position. I also wish to disrupt those professional discourses that frame the needs of parents and children in ways that stigmatise those who are perceived to be unable to cope (Gillies, 2005; Kidger, 2004). Services to support parents can be *universally* beneficial rather than a form of crisis management for families at risk. As I argued in Chapter Two, economically poor mothers are especially vulnerable to arguments that pathologise their caring practices (Krane and Davies, 2000; Scourfield, 2001) and these are implicit in some Sure Start programmes and other area-based anti-poverty programmes. Social work practitioners may engage in 'mother-blaming' (Turney, 2000) and the concept of 'neglect' is socially constructed and framed in relation to the gendered nature of care. Hence, parents may be reluctant to articulate their caring practices in relation to feelings of stress and inability to cope. This may help to explain why it was difficult to encourage mothers to open up about the day to day pressures of caring for children, an issue explored in Chapter Two. Nevertheless, when the focus was taken away from their caring practices to their perceptions of gaps in service provision, a different picture started to emerge.

In Chapter One I introduced the literature on social capital and referred to the growing interest in using this to understand mothering practices (Reay, 2005). In Chapter Six I argued that the availability of social networks of support, provided by family, friends and neighbours, was important in helping many mothers manage childcare and avoid social isolation. These are predominantly gendered social networks and they do confer advantages for those mothers who have access to this form of social capital. I have also showed that where mothers do not have any

informal support available, they are acutely aware that this places them at a disadvantage. At worst, these informal networks may actively exclude certain mothers (see Tracey's account in Chapter Six) causing distress. In addition these social networks can be important for sustaining gendered moral rationalities that if the care of children cannot be done entirely by mothers, that the only acceptable alternative is care by female relatives, friends or neighbours. In this chapter I will provide further evidence that the organisation of childcare can be understood in relation to access to (gendered) social and emotional capital.

The chapter is divided into three sections. In Section One, I describe the three case study areas with regard to the main kinds of formal childcare and other services for parents and children that are available. In Section Two, I discuss the parents' use of and perspectives on formal childcare services. In Section Three, I examine the other services that parents may utilise alongside childcare and early years education and explore their perspectives on gaps in provision. In conclusion, both the benefits and drawbacks of current childcare provision are identified in relation to the criteria of support, choice and need.

SECTION ONE: THE CASE STUDY AREAS

The research was conducted in three Electoral Divisions of Swansea West with contrasting socio-economic and ethnic profiles, and will be referred to as Crossland, Tinbury and Shaw. These Electoral Divisions were introduced in Chapter Two. Further information based on statistics collated from the 2001 Census (City and County of Swansea 2003a, 2003b, 2003c) is provided in Appendix 1. The focus of

this Section is on the types of childcare and early years services available in each area.

There are three broad purposes for childcare that I will consider (Brunel University, 2000). First, there is childcare for working parents. Second, there is childcare to support child development and to provide early learning experiences. Third, there is childcare to provide respite for parents. Childcare for the first category relates only to those families where parents are working. However, it could be argued that there is a case for the delivery of free universal provision in order to meet the second and third categories of needs (Daycare Trust, 2003). Current childcare policy directs resources primarily towards working parents leading to inequalities amongst children and their parents. Childcare policy to support paid work is based on the assumption that the market will respond to local demand whilst childcare policy to support child development and early years education is targeted mainly towards designated socially deprived areas through short-term funding. This means different kinds of childcare provision are available in different localities rather than a universal service capable of meeting diverse needs (Daycare Trust, 2003). Where you live makes a significant difference in terms of access to support inevitably leaving significant gaps for many parents and children. This undermines policy claims that "childcare is for children" (WAG, 2005e). The needs of children are met within a volatile and divisive market in childcare leading to significant differences between areas in the availability of childcare for paid work, child development or parental respite.

This problem is illustrated forcefully when we consider the three areas and the kinds of childcare and parenting support services available. With regard to formal

childcare, this might include private day nurseries or creches, registered childminders and out of school provision such as Breakfast Clubs, After-School Clubs and wrap-around nursery provision and holiday play schemes. In addition there are morning or afternoon playgroups that tend to run for sessions of between two to three hours for pre-school children from two to five years of age. Some of these charge a fee and others are subsidised. There are also creches that are run to cater for the childcare needs of parents who are studying. Early years education through the state sector for children aged three years and over may also be available through school nurseries or state nursery schools. Childcare and early years education services overlap (Rahilly and Johnston, 2002; Penn, 2000). Some parents may use private day nurseries for educational purposes and others may use a combination of playgroups and/or state nursery provision while they are working. Parents may choose to use services outside of the area in which they live for a variety of reasons.

Parents may be supported further through the provision of parent and toddler groups, weekend and evening clubs for children, safe play and leisure facilities and parenting advice. Parents' use of these services is considered in Section Three.

Crossland

This is a mainly working class area with an ethnically diverse population. There is limited provision in the immediate locality for parents who need childcare in order to work. There are some private day nurseries bordering the locality although staff advised that they tended to be used by parents from outside the immediate area. There is a College nursery in a neighbouring area that is accessible to people living

in Crossland and had been used by some of the parents that I interviewed. At the time of the research there were only two registered childminders listed for the area and they both advised that they had stopped childminding several months ago [xlviii].

Primary schools in the area offer half-day nursery provision. One school was operating an After School Club that closed down during the fieldwork because the numbers using the facility were so low. Another school was continuously reviewing the services that it could offer to parents and had tried running wrap-around nursery provision, a pre-school playgroup, and a parent and toddler group and had consulted parents to find out if there would be demand for an after-school club. However, these services were not well used by parents. In addition Sure Start projects were operating in the area through the Minority Ethnic Women's Network who offer childcare provision for women attending education and training classes. There were plans to initiate parenting classes with minority ethnic women through Sure Start.

There were several churches running activities such as parent and toddler groups and evening Kids Clubs and Brownies and Rainbows. Children within the local Muslim community also attend classes and activities at the local Mosques. In addition Swansea Leisure Centre was located near Crossland Ward and had been used by many of the parents in my sample prior to its closure in November 2003.

Shaw

This is a mainly white, middle-class area with a high proportion of people in professional occupations. There are many private day nurseries including those based at the hospital and University. Indeed, one nursery manager commented that she felt

that there were too many nurseries competing for business in the same area, although some parents using childcare in this area appeared to disagree with this, having found both their first and second choice nurseries were fully booked. This is also an area that is well served by registered childminders and I heard of some experienced childminders giving up their work on account of the difficulties of attracting enough custom. In this area the childminders operate a support group with regular meetings, arrangements to attend the same parent and toddler groups and the provision of cover if one of them should fall ill. Childminders in the area felt that demand for their service was declining and that some parents seemed to be exercising a preference for day nurseries. With regard to out-of-school care, the two primary schools in the area ran after-school clubs that had waiting lists because of high demand. Since the fieldwork has been completed both schools have started to run Breakfast Clubs and one school offers a wrap-around lunch club [xlix] and playgroup for the children attending the half-day nursery. There is also a state nursery school on the Tinbury/ Shaw border that offers free, half-day provision for children aged three years and over. This has traditionally taken children from Shaw and Tinbury as well as other areas [l]. There was a pre-school playgroup for children aged 3 years and above that charged fees and there was a fee-paying Welsh medium playgroup. There were several parent and toddler groups run by the local Churches and activities for older children such as Cubs and Brownies and sporting activities at the local schools.

Tinbury

The population in this area is mainly white, working class with significantly high unemployment levels and people living in Local Authority housing. Many lone parents and young families are housed here. There are no private day nurseries that provide care for a full working day. There is a creche at the Community Resource Centre that was initially registered to provide sessional care of up to four hours per day. The creche has since been registered to provide sessional care of up to six hours per day. Hence, working parents can use the facility but it cannot cater for the needs of those working full-time. Many of the parents who use the creche are students on College courses taking place in the Community Resource Centre. There were no registered childminders listed in this area at the time of the research. Those parents living in Tinbury who need childcare in order to work would need to look outside the area for registered childcare. In terms of out-of-school care, one school had looked into the possibility of providing an after-school club but had found there was little interest for this. Another school that lies outside the area but has a large proportion of pupils from Tinbury had been unable to get funding to start an after-school club as the school was outside the designated funding area[li]. However, they were able to run a Playgroup in collaboration with the local Family Centre for children aged two years and over and full wrap-around care for children aged three years and over who attend the school nursery. The state nursery school mentioned in relation to Shaw also serves the Tinbury area. Another school that serves the area has also developed a creche for children aged two years and above and this acts a wrap-around facility for those children that attend the morning nursery in the school. Although the fees were much lower than those charged by playgroups in the Shaw area the leader said that

the fees were still out of the reach of many local parents and they were struggling to attract enough children to make the facility viable in the long-term.

Childcare provision is also offered at the local Family Centre through a playgroup and a creche for parents while they attend classes at the Centre. Some of the classes are designed to provide family support on topics such as family health and well being and there are parenting groups that meet at the Centre. There is also a Parent and Toddler drop-in group. Social Workers and Health Visitors refer some families to the Centre and others are self-referrals. The Centre is funded mainly through Social Services. Previously the Centre had offered respite care for vulnerable parents but this has expanded so that more general support to families is offered. There is also support available through several Sure Start projects and there is a health visitor for Sure Start based at the Community Resource Centre.

There are some parent and toddler groups such as the one at Tinbury Baptist Church and the Welsh medium parent and toddler group that meets at Tinbury Community Centre.

Having provided a picture of the services available in each area, it is possible to assess the scope of provision in relation to the three broad areas of need identified earlier. In terms of *childcare to support working parents*, those living in Shaw would appear to have access to appropriate provision in the private sector through day nurseries, out of school care and registered childminders. Shaw is an area where a buoyant private market in childcare has developed as a result of demand from parents who are able to pay for these services. In comparison, working parents living in

Crossland may have to make use of childcare outside the immediate area especially if their children are too young to be placed in the facilities offered by the schools. Parents living in Tinbury who need childcare in order to work face significant difficulties and may need to be willing and able to travel some distance for a place in a day nursery or with a registered childminder. However, the Community Creche is providing a useful service for parents who are able to confine their working hours and travel time within the limits of a six- hour session and three of the mothers in this position were interviewed. Hence, a childcare service based on market demand leaves gaps for working parents living in areas where, for cultural or economic reasons, the majority of parents of young children do not work. In areas such as Shaw where there is high demand there are still significant gaps in certain kinds of childcare and for particular age groups as I shall demonstrate later.

In terms of *childcare for education and child development*, there are both school nurseries and pre-school playgroups operating in all three areas. In addition parent and toddler groups play a role in this regard. However, this provision did not appear to be well advertised. In addition, the costs of these groups were variable, generally costing significantly more in Shaw compared with Crossland and Tinbury. Whilst there was a long waiting list for the Pre-School Playgroup in Shaw, the Playgroups in Tinbury and Crossland were struggling to attract parents and children. Similarly, the After-School Clubs in Shaw had waiting lists whilst the only one operating in Crossland had to close and there were none operating in Tinbury. Hence, the area based approach to targeting funding for not-for-profit childcare leaves parents on low incomes in Shaw not catered for whilst resources appear to be left underused in Tinbury and Crossland eventually resulting in the closure of services. These are

problems of sustainability that policy-makers are well aware of as illustrated in Chapter Five.

With regard to *childcare to provide respite for parents*, there are significant gaps. Access will depend on either having the material resources to buy time for oneself, being identified as in need of support by a Health Visitor or Social Worker or living in an area that is designated for receipt of targeted funding through programmes such as Sure Start or Communities First. Even for those parents resident in areas such as Crossland and Tinbury that receive targeted funding, respite care cannot be assured. Generally it comes with strings attached such as willingness to participate in further education or training or improving one's parenting skills as opposed to simply having a rest. The notion that all parents need some respite and recognition that opportunities for this might prevent people from reaching the point of crisis does not fit easily within discursive frames that link work, education, childcare and parental responsibility in the ways described earlier.

Having provided a picture of the services in each area, I will now turn to the views of the parents on their use of formal childcare facilities.

SECTION TWO: CHOOSING AND USING CHILDCARE SERVICES.

Parents were asked to reflect on the availability of formal childcare services, their perceptions of how far these services could meet their needs and their views on any significant gaps in provision. This provided an opportunity for both parents who had made use of formal childcare services and those who had never made use of these

services to express their feelings about the use of formal childcare provision. All parents were asked a series of questions in connection with the themes below:

- Who uses formal childcare and for what reasons?

- How do parents choose an appropriate facility? Do they feel that they have a choice? What factors influence their decision? Which sources of information do they make use of and are these adequate?

- How does the availability or non-availability of informal support from family, friends and neighbours interact with the use of formal provision?

- What do parents perceive as the benefits and drawbacks of using formal childcare? What are the most significant gaps in provision?

I will comment on some of the key trends in relation to these four themes.

(a) Who uses formal childcare and early years educational services and why?

Given that I made initial contact with many parents through visits to providers of formal childcare and early years education, it is not surprising that the majority of my sample had made some use of either formal childcare or early years educational services. Hence my findings cannot be taken to be representative of all parents of young children, some of whom may firmly believe that their children should be cared for entirely at home. There will be other parents who may wish to make use of these

services but are unable to access them for a variety of reasons who will also be left out of my sample. Nevertheless, my research uncovered a wide variety of patterns of use of services that reflected diversity in the childcare needs of parents and some distinctive positions on why these services should be used or avoided. The most clear cut distinction appeared to be between parents who used formal childcare to cover periods of time when they were in paid work or further education and parents who used early years services such as school nurseries and pre-school playgroups in order to prepare their children for school. Some parents used these services for both of these purposes. There were a much smaller number of parents who mentioned the value of these services in providing a break for parents reflecting prevailing discourses surrounding the purpose of childcare and early years education for work and child development rather than to relieve parental stress.

In **Shaw**, seven out of the eight parents had used formal childcare for the purpose of cover for paid work. Of these Becky and Kelly had done or did this on a part-time basis whilst Janet, Gail, Lowri, Kenneth and Malcolm had or continued to do so on a full-time basis. It was only in Shaw that my sample included parents working full-time. Only one mother (Greta) had never used formal childcare because both her husband and herself had flexible working patterns and were able to cover out of school periods between them. Two of the mothers (Becky and Gail) had given up full-time work since their families had expanded meaning that they were no longer currently using formal childcare, but they did have younger children attending local nursery and pre-school services. None of the parents in the Shaw sample articulated any unease over the use of formal childcare if it were needed although some did express a concern to limit it. Janet, for example, had always worked part-time during

school hours until recently. She had been given the opportunity to work full-time and train for a career meaning she had to start using formal childcare for the first time:

> I don't agree with putting children into childcare every day really. But the mornings from breakfast time and then after-school club every day, I have never agreed with. But I have found that my circumstances have changed and this is what I have got to do at the moment. If (child) wasn't happy, then I would certainly reconsider.

Some parents using formal childcare because they were working also believed that it was good for their child's development. Kelly, for example, explained that even when she had been employing a full-time nanny, she had decided to send the older child to a private day nursery once she was two years old to encourage socialisation. Mavis, the only grandmother in the Shaw sample, used limited formal childcare to assist child development and for some respite as both she and her husband found they tired easily caring for a young child. Between them the sample had used a wide variety of services including childminders, After-School Clubs, private day nurseries, kids camp, a nanny, the state nursery school, a pre-school playgroup and private babysitters. Some parents did comment on using childcare to buy time for their own leisure. Kenneth, for example, stressed that he and his partner regularly used a private babysitter to ensure they had some leisure time together. Kelly explained that she had changed her pattern of part-time work and use of childcare to allow one day at home without her children as she had been getting no time for herself or to complete domestic tasks. Hence, this sample included some parents with the material resources to buy childcare for leisure and respite purposes. As I have argued earlier, for those parents living in Shaw and lacking these resources, there are no subsidised childcare services designed to provide respite free or at a low cost. Similarly, parents in this area need to be in a position to pay for early years education until their child

reaches the age of three years when they can attend a facility offering free, state nursery education on a part-time basis.

In **Crossland** three out of the ten parents (Emma, Diane, Farah) used childcare while they worked on a part-time basis. In Farah's case she had used a private day nursery for a short period but had found that she could not cover the high costs. Emma and Diane were both lone parents who worked part-time and received some financial support for formal childcare through the Tax Credit system. Diane used a private day nursery located in Shaw meaning that she had to take a bus ride to leave her daughter there before getting a lift in to work. Emma had also used childcare facilities in the Shaw area previously but was now using her local after-school club. This facility has since closed down because it could not attract sufficient numbers. Tracey received childcare support through social services on account of her disability, meaning that a childminder would visit on a daily basis during the school week.

Six of the parents had never used formal childcare (Hameeda, Sadiah, Rashida, Zeena, Aalam, Sunita) to cover for paid work or to provide respite. Hameeda shared the care of her son with her husband as their work patterns could accommodate this but suggested that she would like to send her son to a day nursery soon so that he could benefit educationally. Sadiah and Aalam had no need to use formal childcare. Sadiah did not work and Aalam was a student and his wife was at home full-time. Apart from Farah, mentioned above, the Bangladeshi parents in this sample had never used formal childcare and some expressed views that they would not be willing to make use of it. In Chapter Six comments from Rashida and Zeena illustrated this as both expressed strong views against the use of formal childcare, describing this as

leaving a child 'with strangers'. We have seen that this led to frustration for Rashida who had enjoyed working prior to having a child whilst Zeena was able to work because her extended family would look after her child. Sunita had also enjoyed working before she had children and had considered trying to continue with family support until she learned that she was expecting twins and she did not feel that it would be possible to cope.

With regard to the use of early years services for *educational* reasons all of the parents in this sample were eager for their children to benefit from the half-day nursery provision available in the year before they reached school age. In the case of Emma this had involved changing her working and informal care arrangements at the appropriate time in order to fit in with this provision. Diane's daughter was expected to start at the school nursery in a few months time, meaning that she would have to change both her formal care arrangements and contact agreements with her former husband to fit in with it. Schools in the City vary considerably in their willingness to take parental preferences into account when allocating nursery places. Many schools require children to switch from morning to afternoon session, or vice versa, half way through the year in order to avoid any disputes over the allocation of places. Needless to say, this is a practice that can wreak havoc for working parents and is an issue that I will return to later. Rashida and Zeena who had expressed distrust of formal childcare nevertheless were comfortable with their children going to nursery. Farah described complex and stressful arrangements to ensure her daughter attended a half-day school nursery outside their own catchment area, meaning that she had to spend her lunch break dashing around between work, school and home. These are

practices that reinforce the findings reported in the previous chapter regarding parental support for education.

In contrast to the Shaw sample, none of these parents reported buying childcare services for the purposes of respite and recreation but some did have considerable support from wider family. Others such as Farah and Rashida who were not using formal childcare and felt they lacked family support did report the stresses that they faced.

In **Tinbury**, five out of the ten mothers interviewed individually (Natalie, Danielle, Gillian, Sally and Bronwen) used formal childcare while they worked. Apart from Gillian, the others were all lone parents working part-time. Gillian was married and also worked on a part-time basis. Natalie and Danielle had both moved into Tinbury from Crossland and were still sending their children to the After-School Club at a school in Crossland. Both had been informed shortly before the interview that the Club was to close and neither knew how they were going to cope with this. Both had previously used other types of formal childcare when their children were younger and they were studying. Gillian had used a workplace creche until her daughter became eligible for a half-time state nursery place at the local nursery school. Like some of the mothers in the Crossland sample, this had meant that Gillian had to change her formal childcare arrangements and transfer her daughter to another creche willing to do a pick-up from the nursery. She was planning to change her work arrangements now that her daughter was about to start full-time school in order to minimise the need to use any formal childcare. Sally was working in a voluntary capacity one day per week and her childcare costs were paid for during this time.

Sally also chose to pay for a further session per week in order to get a rest from childcare. Bronwen had used the local creche for occasional sessions prior to starting part-time work and she now used the creche on a regular basis.

With regard to the Tinbury parents that did not use formal childcare in order to work Christine sent her youngest daughter to a creche paid for by her College while she studied. This had been agreed, although her husband was at home full-time, in order for her daughter to socialise. Christine explained that her daughter was being treated for language difficulties and attendance at creche could help with this aspect of her development. All the other parents made use of local pre-school playgroup and nursery facilities. Stella had changed her working hours so that she did not have to use formal childcare but nevertheless sent her daughter to nursery school. Sheila was an educational professional who had been able to take her daughter into work with her and had considerable informal support. Despite working in an education setting that provided some wrap-around childcare for working parents, Sheila was emphatic that she would not use formal childcare herself in order to work. Sheila operated a firm distinction between early years education for the benefit of children and formal childcare for the purpose of work. Similarly, Margaret was working as a registered childminder but felt that she would not want to be in the position of working in a job that took her away from her own children. Joy did not work but did use a creche while attending various classes at her local Family Centre. This was seen as giving her a chance to socialise and have a break from childcare whilst her child would benefit from being able to socialise. Joy also said that neither she nor her husband wanted her to work whilst their child was of pre-school age.

In the group interviews, the four mothers living in Tinbury and with children attending the local nursery school expressed very strong reactions to the use of formal childcare. These mothers articulated strong views against mothers working while their children were of pre-school age in relation to issues of trust and safety. Whilst they were willing to trust teachers, they felt that they could not be sure of people working as childminders or in creches. One of them commented that she only trusted the teachers because her children were attending the same school that she had attended, a view that had also been expressed by some of the Bangladeshi mothers in Crossland. Zeena, for example, who had said that she only worked because she could rely totally on her extended family to care for her child, said:

> You hear all these things in the media, as well, don't you? About children being shaken to death and things like that. I get petrified. For a while I was paranoid about leaving (child) in school as well. He is my only child and I love him to bits and I wouldn't part with him for the world. That is why this school is really good because I came here and I brought my sisters to school and everything and I got to know the teachers as well.

With regard to my interviews with the Sure Start fathers, as a group and individually with Patrick, Michael and Leo, none had used formal childcare in order to work but they had used a variety of playgroups and holiday play schemes provided through Sure Start. There was general agreement that these services were important for the well being of both children and parents.

The samples of parents in each area are small and cannot be claimed to be representative of the wider population. In this sense it is difficult to arrive at any firm conclusions regarding whether the three areas differed in terms of the local gendered moral rationalities at work. This would require further research with larger samples

and using a different method to contact parents. Indeed, what struck me most was the degree to which mothers across the three areas and in different socio-economic circumstances agreed that if formal childcare was used that it should be limited and that they should devise ways to maximise the time they could spend with their children. Danielle's comments reflected the feelings of many of the mothers regardless of geographical location:

> I didn't want her to go to after-school club five days per week as I think that is still a bit too much. So I try to think about how much work I accepted as well... I try to keep her with me as much as possible.

Yet the research also points to some possible *differences* in patterns of use between the three areas that could reflect different local cultural practices and values. These may be connected with gendered moral rationalities even though they were not actually expressed in terms of gender but rather what was best for children. There are thus two ways in which the parents in my samples in each area can be broadly distinguished. First, they expressed different cultural attitudes on whether formal childcare was safe for children. Second, they varied in terms of whether they were able to resolve dilemmas over use of formal childcare through access to informal support. I will comment on these in turn.

Formal Childcare and Child Safety

Whilst some parents in the Shaw sample felt that they wanted to limit their use of formal childcare and some mothers stated a preference to be home with their children, none of them expressed anxiety about using childcare in terms of safety, risk or the wellbeing of their children. Indeed, some justified their use of childcare in

order to work on the grounds that their children were also benefiting educationally or enjoyed their time in childcare. In contrast, some of the parents in Crossland and Tinbury held strong views that it was not appropriate to send children to a formal childcare facility. This was not expressed as a general unwillingness to let their children leave their care because all parents were supportive of pre-school education especially where this was delivered in a school setting. For some parents, teachers are seen as trusted professionals whilst childcare workers are not. Sending children to a facility for educational and developmental reasons sits easily with these parents' sense of their moral obligations and concerns over keeping children safe. These views could be a reflection of differences between Shaw, Crossland and Tinbury over perceptions of community safety in general rather than necessarily a reflection of gendered moral rationalities.

Formal Childcare and Informal Support

Parents in Tinbury and Crossland differed from parents in Shaw in that they were more likely to have access to informal support for childcare, that they would use in preference to or in addition to formal childcare. These gendered networks of social support do operate in all three areas but in Tinbury and Crossland their contribution to the management of childcare seem to be more pronounced. This is an issue that I will consider at more length in Section C because it deserves special attention.

(b) Patterns of parental choice.

Those parents that had used formal childcare were asked how they had searched for an appropriate facility, what factors had influenced their decision and where they had turned for information. Overwhelmingly parents suggested that they used informal and local channels of information such as word-of-mouth recommendations regarding a particular childminder or day nursery. This is unsurprising given that formal channels of information are underdeveloped, an issue that I explored in Chapter Five. In their study of parental choice of childcare for pre-school children, Carol Vincent and Stephen Ball (2001) also found that choice relied on personal recommendation and informal networks. This is compared with evidence that in choosing secondary schools, parents are more likely to rely on formal channels of information such as school publicity and league tables (Ball and Vincent, 1998). Only one parent (Lowri) had referred to her employer for advice. Many did not know where they would go for formal publicity and information about childcare and some suggested that they would look in Yellow Pages or phone the local Council but were not sure whether this was the appropriate place to look. Some parents offered ideas on how childcare information services could be improved and many felt this would work best if delivered locally in the places where parents go:

> I think it would be a good idea if schools and health centres, anywhere really where young children met, could access information, even a list of registered childminders. (Sheila)

> Some doctors will let you advertise in their surgeries. A lot of people go to the doctors with their children so you should be able to advertise there. And schools as well, obviously! (Margaret)

The role of the City and County of Swansea in the co-ordination of a Children's Information Service was addressed in Chapter Five where it was suggested that this needed further development.

Some parents such as Gail described a systematic approach to selecting a provider through visits to those that had been recommended. Others seemed to choose a facility without 'shopping around' for reasons of convenience (for example, a facility close to their place of work) or because it was the only suitable option available (for example a College creche, an after-school club). Some parents had used a wide variety of different kinds of childcare provision as their own needs had changed as children grew older and started school. This suggests that the taking of childcare 'life histories' along the lines of my interviews provides a deeper understanding of the childcare needs of parents than studies that look at this at a single point in time.

In choosing a particular facility parents suggested that some of the following factors would impact on their decision:

- Convenient location for home, work or the child's school.
- Attractive indoor and outdoor facilities.
- Provision of interesting and stimulating activities for their children.
- Flexibility of the service.
- Attention to child safety.
- Quality of the management and staff.
- Positive response of the child to a particular facility on a visit.
- Degree of formality/ structure.

Some parents chose a facility because the structure and activities resembled those of a school. Gail, for example, liked the fact that the private day nursery she had used had a uniform for the children. Conversely, other parents wanted a facility that would be more informal and play based than a school. Sally had decided against a day nursery where the staff wore a uniform and another where the children had to call the staff 'Miss'.

- Cost and availability of place.

  The affordability of provision was mentioned as an issue for many parents yet it was never the main factor to influence choice. This could be because most of the private day nurseries charge broadly similar fees, meaning parents will select on other criteria than cost. However, some local creches offer a cheaper service and some mothers on modest incomes had taken this into account.

A variety of factors will influence how parents choose a facility and in some cases parents may not perceive that there is a choice as only one option may suit. Concerns about safety and being sure their child's general well being is guaranteed may take priority over factors such as affordability and convenience. Once parents had chosen a formal childcare facility, it appeared that most were satisfied with the service that was provided. Where parents had concerns it was with regard to factors such as affordability or flexibility which would impact on their needs rather than the child's. These concerns are discussed later in the chapter.

Parents were asked to reflect on what they liked about the formal childcare facilities that they had used. Their responses reflected two broad themes. First, parents valued the opportunities for education and play offered to their children:

She has a great time and she doesn't miss me. I am quite happy that she is learning lots and she gets lots of social interaction which is really important, especially pre-school. (Diane, Crossland)

Yes, they (after-school club) are very good. They do things each night that are different.... So twice a week, may be once a week, they will make a puppet or.....So they can have a bit of fun after school, they have friends to play with, so they go to after school club and make a puppet. (Emma, Crossland)

We were clear that we wanted to use a day nursery because of the greater number of interactions that occur and the belief that kids get more rounded personalities if they socialise. (Kenneth, Shaw)

Secondly, there were some mothers who were not fully confident about their own role in child development who felt that they could draw on the expertise of staff. Gillian, for example, said that she felt that she had received more advice from staff at her daughter's creche than she had been able to get from her over-worked health visitor:

Yes, they have been marvellous. A lot of her developments, because I was working, such as potty training, a lot of that went on at the creche. They have more knowledge than I have.

Christine also mentioned that she had found her daughter's creche to be helpful with potty training. Joy, although not using formal childcare for work, did use creche facilities at the Family Centre and valued the Centre's role in running parenting classes. She argued that these classes needed to be made more widely available across local community centres:

We have discussed health, you know, healthy eating and behavioural problems. Lots of different things. It has only been going since September and we try to cover different things each week. It is informal and nice to chat about one thing that you have found you have a problem with and come up with solutions between you.

These responses suggest that some mothers may value parenting support initiatives, as did the fathers involved with a Sure Start project in Tinbury. How do we make sense of this in relation to claims that these parenting programmes are based on notions of family pathology (Gillies, 2005)? There are two points to be made here. First, the expression of appreciation for parenting support reveals yet again how local social practices (such as participation in parenting education classes) are tied into wider systems of regulation through discursive frames that remind parents of their responsibilities. These parents are engaging in processes of 'self-surveillance' that may have been reinforced through their participation in these programmes. Those parents that have been identified as being in need of support and have participated in parent education programmes thus become competent in using the discourses to represent their care practices to others. Second, whilst I agree with Gillies (2005) that there is a moralizing discourse surrounding parenting initiatives, some of the workers that I met through Sure Start had a more politicised understanding of their role in working with parents and in community development. This suggests there is scope for professionals to maintain alternative understandings of how parental support should be delivered that avoid moralizing or stigmatising. These different understandings may emerge from professional discourse and from practice. Both parenting practices and professional understandings of how parental support should be offered are thus tied into powerful discursive frames but are not entirely contained by them. I shall return to this point regarding the scope for disrupting discourses in Chapter Eight.

(c) The interaction of informal support and use of formal childcare.

I have already indicated that there were differences between parents in their access to informal support for childcare. Parents could be divided into one of four groups to describe the interaction of formal childcare and informal support in their management of childcare. This is an alternative way of examining childcare needs that disrupts the notion that these needs should be assessed primarily in relation to whether or not parents are working. Rather, this looks at their needs in terms of networks of support and moral notions surrounding care and children's well being as well as practical needs. Here I categorise parents according to their current circumstances whilst acknowledging that parents may have moved between categories over time. Those parents that are listed as using formal childcare provision (Boxes A and C) are those that use childcare to work, study or gain respite. Those parents that are listed as not using formal childcare provision (Boxes B and D) are those that either do not *need* to do so and/or have strong views that it would be *wrong* to do so. This is distinct from use of early years education to provide socialising experiences for children because *all* the parents expressed a willingness to make use of pre-school education when their child reached the appropriate age. I have also identified each parent in relation to where they live (S=Shaw; T= Tinbury; C=Castle) in order to support my claim that there may be broad differences between these areas in access to gendered social capital.

BOX 10: MANAGING CHILDCARE THROUGH FORMAL AND INFORMAL SUPPORT.

TYPE OF CHILDCARE COMBINATION	*Use Formal Childcare Provision*	*Do Not Use Formal Childcare Provision*
No informal childcare support	A Kelly (S), Lowri (S), Kenneth (S), Malcolm (S), Sally (T)	B Becky (S), Greta (S), Gail(S), Rashida (C), Farah (C), Stella (T), Margaret (T)
Do have informal childcare support	C Janet (S), Mavis (S), Emma (C), Diane (C), Tracey (C), Natalie (T), Danielle (T), Christine (T), Gillian (T), Bronwen (T)	D Hameeda (C), Sadiah (C), Zeena (C), Jackie (C), Aalam (C), Sunita (C), Sheila (T*)[lii], Joy (T), Nursery Mothers (T)

Further information about the childcare arrangements of each parent or grandparent is provided in Appendix 8.

In view of the construction of my sample through 'snowballing', caution needs to be exercised in making generalisations from the data. Nevertheless, the table does suggest some interesting patterns of childcare use and childcare needs. I will suggest some tentative ways of interpreting these patterns that would need to be explored through further research with a larger sample.

The Box reveals that parents in Shaw are most likely to have no informal support. Only one mother out of the sample of eight, Janet, had some informal support although she did still need to make use of formal childcare provision. In contrast the

majority of parents in Crossland (9 out of 11) and Tinbury (7 out of 10 plus the 4 mothers in the group interview) did have informal support. It is access to this informal support that enables mothers living in Crossland and Tinbury to do paid work.

I will now comment on the characteristics of parents in each of the four childcare combinations.

Group A (no informal support/ do use formal childcare)

There are only five parents who use formal childcare and have no informal support. This may seem surprising as it might be expected that parents lacking informal support would have the greatest need to utilise formal childcare. However, formal childcare does not cater for all working patterns, is expensive, can be inflexible and does not provide cover for sickness. Hence, it can be terribly difficult to balance work and formal care in the absence of any informal support to plug gaps and to limit the costs. Parents may find that it is easier for one parent to stay at home rather than cope with trying to manage this in the absence of any informal help [liii]. Hence, it does not seem surprising that this is a small group comprising mainly parents from the Shaw area in well-paid professional jobs. Nevertheless, Lowri and Malcolm both spoke at length about the problems created when their children were ill because they had no informal support to help manage this.

Group B (no informal support/ do not use formal childcare)

Where parents lack any informal support, this may lead to a decision to give up work or make 'shift parenting' (Lewis, 2003) arrangements rather than use formal childcare while they work. There are some mothers in this category who did not feel comfortable with using formal childcare leading them to give up work (Rashida), rearrange their hours of work (Stella) or do a home based job that enabled them to be with their children (Margaret). Other mothers, such as Gail, reluctantly gave up work having previously used formal childcare because it became too stressful and was damaging her health. The availability of informal support might have led to her feeling better able to cope. Others, such as Farah, had tried to work and use formal childcare but found they could not afford the costs. In this case Farah is especially vulnerable in that she has no choice but to continue to work without any significant informal support or formal childcare. She has to rush around to meet the needs of paid work and care.

Group C: Have Informal Support Combined With Formal Childcare Provision

These mothers do work and use formal childcare, yet rely on informal arrangements to cover the gaps. It seems to be the availability of this informal care that makes the use of formal childcare possible. Hence, parents who do not have this support are especially vulnerable and those that do are often anxious that they could lose it. For some of these mothers there are worries that these informal arrangements may break down leaving them in a difficult position. Despite the availability of informal support

some of these mothers felt stressed out and guilty about asking for help. Janet, for example, had returned to full-time work and study after many years of fitting part-time work around the needs of her children. Although her adult children had helped by collecting the youngest child from an after-school club and by staying with him during illness, they were making their own plans to leave home. Janet was worried about how she would be able to cope once this happened. Danielle and Natalie had a reciprocal arrangement but felt that it was different relying on friends rather than family. They both still felt vulnerable because they had no family living in Wales. Bronwen was only able to start work at eight o'clock and use a creche that opened at nine o'clock by relying on a friend. The friend would look after her son for an hour and take him to the creche: "We have sorted it, we swap children as she is on her own as well" (Bronwen). She had only been in work for a few weeks and had persuaded her father to baby-sit on those Saturdays when she was working but was not sure that she could keep asking him to do this. Similarly, Emma could ask her father to help if her children were ill but talked of feeling this should be limited:

> My Dad would help then in emergencies. I don't ask him all the time to have the children. As they just run round him and he just spends silly money on them. He spoils them. I like to keep my Dad for emergencies. I don't like to put on him all the time.

Hence the management of work and childcare in these circumstances can be stressful, informal care may not be taken for granted and it is hardly surprising that some mothers move out of the labour market altogether especially once they have more than one child.

Group D: Do have informal support and do not use formal childcare.

These parents manage childcare with informal support from family and friends but do not need to use formal childcare. Some of these parents are working and say that they are able to do so because of this informal support. Both Zeena and Sheila work on the basis that they have extensive informal support. Both expressed the view that they would not continue work if they had to turn to formal childcare. Other mothers such as Sadiah, Sunita, Joy and the mothers at the nursery do not feel it is appropriate for them to work while their children are young. Hameeda and her husband are both able to work without using formal care on the basis of 'shift-parenting' and limited informal support if their working hours overlap and Hameeda can take her son into her place of work for the final hour of her working day.

Parents have different ways of managing childcare and each combination of managing care has its benefits and its drawbacks with implications for parental well being. Parents' satisfaction with their arrangements can still vary within each group. Parents in Group A may appear to be the most materially privileged group in that they have employment that enables them to use formal childcare, pursue a career and have respite although they have no informal support. Four out of the five parents in this group were white, middle class professionals living in Shaw. These are the parents that the private childcare market has traditionally catered for and is the model that childcare policy is seeking to extend to a wider group of parents through tax credits. Nevertheless these parents still report stresses in plugging the gaps such as

when a child is ill. For these parents the lack of informal support can still be a problem despite their capacity to pay for formal childcare.

Parents of Group B varied considerably in whether they were satisfied with an arrangement that meant they had no relief from childcare, either formally or informally. Potentially this could be seen as the most vulnerable group, yet feelings about their position depended on how much control parents perceived they had over it. Becky and Margaret relished being home full-time with their children despite lacking informal support and this was expressed as a positive choice. In contrast Rashida was resentful, depressed and felt isolated, but nevertheless felt strongly that the use of formal childcare was not appropriate. Both Gail and Farah had stopped using formal childcare reluctantly although for different reasons. These mothers seem to conform to the symbol of the 'sensitive mother' (Walkerdine and Lucey, 1989), making accommodations for their children, but their feelings about doing so couldn't be more different.

Parents of Group C seem fortunate in that they are able to organise a combination of formal and informal care while they work or study. Nevertheless they were vulnerable in that they seemed to be aware that these informal arrangements could break down or change in the future. The need to rely on informal support also seemed to cause feelings of guilt for some. Finally, those of Group D seemed to have the least anxiety about their arrangements. They had access to sufficient informal support to be able to work without using formal childcare (e.g Zeena, Sheila) and to avoid social isolation if they were not in paid work or education (e.g Sunita, Joy, nursery mothers). Nevertheless, even in these favourable circumstances, mothers'

moral codes could influence how they felt about their arrangements. Hameeda enjoyed her work and was highly satisfied sharing care with her husband, whilst Sheila, who had considerable informal support, was unhappy about working full-time because she felt that she was missing out on precious time with her child.

These patterns of managing childcare indicate that factors, such as the means to pay for formal childcare (whether through well-paid work or Tax Credits) and flexible working conditions, may help those parents who are in paid work but complex moral and emotional factors will interact with this. The availability of emotional and social capital in the form of informal support for managing childcare plays a significant role in enabling some mothers to do paid work with childcare arrangements that remain in tune with their moral codes and anxieties over child safety. This was especially true for mothers living in Crossland and Tinbury suggesting there are geographies of childcare in which access to gendered social capital is the key distinguishing factor. Some parents will continue to look after their children full-time because they enjoy it, because they feel morally obliged to do so or because they have no choice because suitable paid work or suitable childcare is unavailable. Where parents do work and use formal care, many of them will only do so if there is some informal support to make this possible. Others will work only if they can do this without having to make use of formal care at all. Those that use formal childcare whether with informal support or not remain fearful their arrangements will break down.

(d) Parental perceptions of the most significant gaps in formal childcare provision.

In this section I will concentrate on what parents have to say about gaps in childcare provision, whilst in the conclusion I will use the data as a whole to suggest where policy appears to be falling short of meeting parental needs and preferences.

(i) Affordability of childcare: many parents commented on the high costs of childcare. Overall, sixteen of the parents referred to this factor. Many parents who were able to pay for childcare acknowledged that it would not be affordable for some and other parents complained that they felt they were struggling to cover high charges. Gail, for example, said that she felt that parents were left at the mercy of the childcare market and that private day nurseries put up their fees whenever it suited them. Aalam complained that formal childcare only catered for a section of the population rather than the whole community.

(ii) Out-of-school childcare/ transition from nursery to school: some of the parents with older children felt that managing childcare had become more difficult once their child had started school. Parents that had made extensive use of formal childcare in the early years and those with no informal support faced new problems with this transition. Whilst private day nurseries, nannies and childminders may cover for a long day for most of the year, once children start school there are many gaps that not all childcare providers are willing or available to fill. Some parents found that dropping children off at school was especially difficult because schools

would not accept children in the playground until there was staff supervision at around 8.40 in the morning:

> I start work here at half-past eight and there are times when (wife) has got a nine o'clock lecture or occasionally a nine o'clock meeting and she will be called in for that and the school starts at nine. So there is always that little quarter of an hour, twenty minutes and just to know that there was either a pre-school club, not even a breakfast club, but just pre-school supervision in the playground so that we could safely leave (child) there. (Kenneth, Shaw)

Janet was resentful that she had to pay £7 per day to a childminder to cover a twenty-minute period before the school gates opened. Both Lowri and Kelly had to start work at nine o'clock meaning a frantic dash from school to work. Kenneth's suggestion (quoted above) was that this could be resolved through the availability of early playground supervision whilst other parents had made it known to the school that they would like a breakfast club. Since the fieldwork was completed both primary schools in the Shaw area have opened Breakfast Clubs, an initiative supported by the Welsh Assembly. Nevertheless, one advisor to the Welsh Assembly who was interviewed said that the initiative had been 'sold' to schools on grounds of health rather than childcare in order to avoid objections from the teaching unions. It would appear, therefore, that the role of schools in supporting working parents is not guaranteed.

Many of the parents in the sample were using After-School Clubs and were highly satisfied with the service that they provided:

> The after-school club is brilliant. That is £5.50 a day which I do not mind paying at all as it is straight from school and it is up to six o'clock. And I find that is such good value. Because whenever I go to get him, he is always doing something- playing draughts or chess. So that is an enjoyable extension of their

education as they are always doing something that is constructive. (Janet, Shaw)

However, some had faced problems in coping with this period after school. Kelly had found that despite Shaw being well served by registered childminders that none were available just to do a school pick-up. She was on the waiting list for the After-School Club for a long time. Similarly, Lowri had waited a long time for places for her two children and had not been able to get all the days that she needed at first. Malcolm had sent his daughter to After-School Club since she first started school. He reported that his daughter had been very upset at first as the Club caters mainly for older children and she had been asked to stand with a teacher watching all her classmates being collected by family before being taken over on her own to the After-School Club. Although he was now very pleased with the service provided he had felt that this transition could have been managed in a more sensitive manner. While parents in Shaw have to wait for a place at the two After-School Clubs in the area, parents using the After-School Club in Crossland had been told it would close down because of insufficient numbers, leaving them with no alternative in the area. The two mothers living in Tinbury needing after-school care had continued to send their children to a school several miles away in Crossland that had an After-School Club rather than move them to a local school where there was no provision.

The other major gap reported by many working parents with older children concerned cover for the school holidays. Many had no idea how they were going to manage the school holidays as it was never clear when and where holiday play schemes would run. This is one area where parents felt strongly that information and publicity could be better managed. Some parents commented that by the time

publicity was available places would already be full. Janet's comments were typical of other working parents with school age children:

> I don't think there is enough childcare available. I found it hard to find. I don't feel that I have got the right childcare for (child) as far as the school holidays are concerned. I know that in the long-term I am going to have to look for somewhere but even the schemes that are run by the Council, there are never enough places. The places are usually booked months in advance.

Some of the nurseries I visited provided holiday cover but explained that they did not need to advertise because places would be taken up quickly by those parents who knew that they ran a play scheme. Many parents said that they had no idea where to go for advice on holiday cover. Some parents felt that holiday play schemes only ran in certain designated areas whilst other areas such as Shaw were left without any local provision. Other parents had used private day nurseries for holiday cover but felt that their older children did not enjoy their time there because they were mainly geared to the needs of pre-school children.

Most parents appeared to be very supportive of the half-day nursery provision that is available across Swansea for children in the year before they start school. Janet, for example, said:

> Well, when I speak to people in England, they don't know anything about nursery schools. Nursery schools are not heard of and you realise when you go out of Wales how lucky we are. I mean I went to nursery school forty- three years ago! I think it is incredible.

However, it was also acknowledged that this could be very difficult to manage where parents were working. Some parents had to change their work and childcare arrangements to accommodate this whilst others had to forego the free half-day place

and keep a child in a private day nursery until they started school. Gail, for example, commented that one advantage for her younger child of her having given up full-time work was that she could attend the state nursery school and would be starting school with a group of friends. In contrast she had had to keep her older child in a private day nursery until she started school because she was working full-time, meaning that her daughter had started school without knowing anybody. As discussed earlier, Farah sent her daughter to a school nursery even though this created major problems for her when she was working. Similarly, Malcolm felt that the transition from day nursery to school was often poorly managed. Many schools stagger intake to reception classes so that parents who have been using full-time formal childcare suddenly find that their child has to start school on half-days initially and some schools alternate between morning and afternoon sessions so that arranging childcare cover can be very difficult:

> One of my colleagues, she lived on the other side of Swansea and she was having to drive out, pick the child up from nursery, take the child up to school and get back. She had an hour to do that and she had to try to get a lunch in between. In that time period she got two speeding tickets for just simply trying to get there and back in time. The stress levels are horrendous. She was absolutely cream-crackered. It was the only way that she could do it as there was no other way of getting the child from one place to the other. She also had the stress of trying to remember which way the child was going as well because the school had them mornings one week and afternoons the next week! It is very, very stressful. I think that sort of period could be managed better. I think the schools don't really take that on board either. (Malcolm, Shaw)

The inflexibility parents may encounter from certain schools needs to be addressed and some schools need to be reminded that many parents will be in paid work. Some schools are making considerable effort to cater for working parents but others appear to be very unhelpful.

(iii) The inflexibility of formal childcare

Several parents felt that formal childcare was not flexible enough to cater for diverse needs, shifting work patterns, emergencies and sick children. Malcolm argued that this was an area where parents lacking any informal support faced particular difficulties. He felt that it was hard to manage occasional and unpredictable gaps in childcare created when schools closed on account of bad weather or occasional staff development days or when children fell ill. Whilst it is sometimes believed that childminders offer the flexibility to cover these gaps, he had found that childminders were only interested in parents needing regular childcare rather than *ad hoc* work. Similarly, Danielle said that she would like the provision of flexible care to help parents cope with emergencies. Kelly had found that there were no childminders in Shaw willing to do a pick-up from school as it paid more to give priority to pre-school children requiring a full-time place. Hence, even in an area such as Shaw that was better served by childminders than Tinbury or Crossland, it was not necessarily true that childminders offered the flexibility required by parents to cover these gaps.

Other parents commented that childcare was inflexible in that most providers wanted a regular commitment. Most required parents to give several weeks notice if they no longer needed a place, would operate a policy of only taking children for a minimum number of sessions per week and generally required that sessions should be on the same day each week. Where parents would have valued support for a short period of time to get some respite, it was impossible to find a provider willing to do this. Farah commented that she would like a provider willing to take a child for just one or two

hours per day. Similarly, Sally felt that there should be a facility for parents who simply wanted some respite for an hour or two:

> There is not that much choice for those on a low budget. There is not that much choice for them. There is a lot of choice for professionals with families and stuff but not much choice for women who just need a break because they have no mothers and just need one morning a week or something.

Sally expressed her disappointment that the Leisure Centre had closed because that had provided an occasional creche for parents using the sports facilities or going shopping in town. She had used it regularly in order to buy some time for herself. She felt that there was nowhere else in the City that offered this facility.

Some mothers did feel that the Tinbury Community Creche offered a more flexible service in this regard than other childcare providers. Gillian had found that the creche was willing to take her daughter for *ad hoc* sessions and this was important because her husband worked rotating shifts, meaning their childcare needs varied each week. Sally had also chosen the creche because the manager was willing to offer flexible hours. Bronwen had been able to use this facility for *ad hoc* sessions prior to using it on a more regular basis. However, this creche is unusual in offering this degree of flexibility and the views of these parents would suggest that this is a service that could be more widely available.

One further concern was that childcare providers do not cater for the wide variety of working patterns that parents may be required to work. Bronwen had to rely on informal care to cover periods when she started work early morning and on a Saturday. This was a source of anxiety as she was not sure how long her father was

willing to continue to help her out. She felt there should be a twenty-four hour, seven days per week facility to cater for the needs of parents working irregular shifts. Greta, a student nurse, had also argued that there should be a twenty-four hour nursery for hospital staff along the lines she had been used to in her home country. Janet was concerned that private day nurseries and childminders tended to be closed during the Christmas period and Bank Holidays. If the support provided by her adult children came to an end this would be a problem as both she and her partner worked in an occupation that required them to be available at any time. Joy, although choosing to stay at home while her child was young, felt that it would be difficult for her to find suitable work in the future as most of the jobs that she felt able to do extended to weekends and hours not covered by most childcare providers.

SECTION THREE: PARENTS' USE OF OTHER SERVICES FOR FAMILIES AND CHILDREN

In placing use of childcare in the context of family well-being, it was important to find out how parents spent their time with their children, what they enjoyed most about parenting, what they found difficult and which local services were used in this context. Discussions ranged over a wide range of topics but there are two broad areas that I will consider (a) what parents liked doing with their children in their neighbourhood or beyond; (b) what concerned parents and what else they felt could be offered to support their role as parents.

(a) Enjoying time with children.

Many parents felt that Swansea was a good place for families with young children because of the wide range of outdoor attractions including the parks, cycle paths and the beaches.

> I think we are very lucky where we live as you can just go on a bicycle across the road and then we are safe then across the cycle path. Lots to do down Mumbles and the Gower. (Emma, Crossland)

> There are lots of parks, so there is no shortage of those. Just being near the sea, the countryside and the sea is much better than when I was in (English city). (Kelly, Shaw)

Parents also made positive comments about the availability of parent and toddler groups in their local area suggesting these can be a vital source of support for many. One mother who had been active in running a local parent and toddler group said:

> As soon as I started going to those groups I started making local friends. Other mothers in a similar situation. I think there should be one for every day of the week. (Bronwen, Tinbury)

However, one of the drawbacks of her return to paid work was that she was no longer able to attend these groups, cutting her off from contact with other local mothers with pre-school children.

It was clear that local groups can make a major difference to the well being of parents and their children, especially if they were not in paid work. I referred to Joy

earlier, who had been depressed until her Health Visitor recommended that she get in touch with her local Family Centre:

> I go along Monday morning to a parenting class and (child) stays down in the creche facilities for the morning and they have lunch. Then Tuesday morning we have drop-in session, which is mums and babies and we stay for dinner. We talk about childcare or whatever. It is just nice for the mums to sit and chat and the children can play together.

Similarly, the mothers that were interviewed as a group said that they had a weekly routine that involved visits to the parent and toddler group at a local church and a Welsh medium playgroup at the community centre.

Some parents acknowledged that these parent and toddler groups could exclude certain parents. Diane attended a number of parent and toddler groups in Crossland but felt that these were still run as a 'female space':

> I know some of them are changing and are called parent and toddler but it still seems to be very one-sided. I don't know if that is because women are generally the main carers. I think these places could do something to actually make men feel more comfortable about going to these groups. I think some things are still behind the times a bit, definitely.

This was also an issue for Hameeda, given that her husband was the main carer for their son during the day:

> I think Swansea needs a place for babies and their fathers rather than mothers. Why can't he be paternal? That is my point really. I think they need something for single fathers, fathers who are looking after children in the daytime. At the moment, what is happening even in the black and ethnic minority groups there are more strongheaded females who are working during the daytime and the fathers are having to work in the evening and look after the children during the daytime. It is not just myself, it is other women as well. I know other women are having to leave their children to go to work.

I have already referred to Tracey's distress, when hearing other mothers at the school make arrangements to visit parent and toddler groups together, feeling that she was excluded from this because of her disability.

Where parents did attend local groups, they tended to hear about them through word of mouth as often they were not well advertised, although local libraries will sometimes display publicity and some groups will advertise in the local press. More could be done in this regard to reach parents who are not part of existing social networks. There were a number of mothers that I met who complained that there were no local groups to go to during the day where I was aware that there were facilities close by. Christine (Tinbury) said that she would like somewhere to go locally to meet other mothers:

> Just getting the community together. Rather than being stuck in the house, get them out and get the children playing. If you can't afford childcare, somewhere to go for the morning.

Christine was unaware that her local Family Centre provided this service only five minutes walk from her home. Similarly, Sally expressed an interest in attending local groups but had moved into the area a few months before and did not know where to look. Local churches run the vast majority of groups, suggesting the voluntary sector play a significant role in providing this service for parents. However, it may be that some help is needed in co-ordinating information so parents can easily find out what is available in their area. The role of Children's Information Services will be important in this regard.

In terms of evening groups for older children such as Kids Clubs, Cubs and Brownies and Sporting activities, once again churches play a significant role. Similarly, parents from the Bangladeshi community mentioned the role of the Mosques, the local Islamic bookshop, the Minority Ethnic Women's Association (MEWN) and the Bangladeshi Welfare Association as places that offered activities for children. Zeena, for example, mentioned the valuable role played by MEWN in reaching out to women and children:

> Well, there is MEWN. They organise activities and things like that so we usually go with them to places....They usually try to organise it so that there is a fun day to help people get out and about a bit more. Because some people cannot afford things. So that is really helpful what they do. And they organise exercise classes for women and things like that. And sewing classes for women. After the children have gone to school they have got nothing to do so it just gives them some activities to do without the children.

These groups played a significant role in ensuring the well being of parents and in providing play and educational opportunities for children. They also have the potential to help in the creation of networks of social support that can be crucial especially for those lacking family based social capital. It is possible that a co-ordinated strategy for publicising this provision and ensuring that it does not exclude certain groups would help ensure more parents and children benefit from local facilities.

(b) ***Parental concerns regarding local service provision.***

Whilst parental views on gaps in service provision were quite wide-ranging, there were five themes that emerged most frequently but the emphasis on them varied geographically:

(i) Children's Safety

I have already argued that some parents were unwilling to use formal childcare on the grounds that they felt it could not be trusted. Parental concerns about safety were also articulated in relation to the need for safe play areas for children, protection from traffic and concerns over drugs dealing. Parents in Tinbury and Crossland were especially likely to raise these concerns. Aalam (Crossland), for example, felt that he could not allow his older children to walk home from school alone:

> It is becoming a very unpredictable place, Swansea. Especially with Central Swansea, so it is quite risky leaving them on their own. It is because there are a lot of drugs about, it is because the streets are not properly maintained. People are driving fast where there are no cameras. It is getting a busier place every day. Before it used to be more like a residential area with a family atmosphere.

Michael, one of the fathers at the Sure Start project, lived in Crossland and expressed similar concerns about drugs. He felt that he could not take his daughters to the local park because he believed drug addicts and alcoholics frequented it. Emma lived opposite a children's play area in Crossland and had contacted her local Councillor because the area was being used in an inappropriate way:

> And all the drunks were coming down the lane and laying on the green by the park and I just had enough one day. The kids were playing in the park and there were all these drunken men hanging around.

In Tinbury some of the parents were frustrated that where efforts were made to provide safe play areas for children these were quickly vandalised. The mothers from the nursery felt that there were not enough outdoor play areas for children in the area and older children would vandalise the play equipment and hang around the

playgrounds drinking. The mothers felt that there needed to be firmer efforts to tackle crime in the area. One mother said:

> My oldest boy had his bike pinched off him by an older boy and when I went to the Station, they said they hadn't got enough police in the community to go around the parks. The children have bikes because it is safer for them to come home, because it is quicker for them, but nobody is around to do anything about it. (Group interview, Tinbury)

Joy (Tinbury) also spoke about the lack of outdoor play areas in the neighbourhood meaning that she needed transport to get to a park in a safer area:

> And the parks, there aren't really many parks. They started doing a park up by the Centre but the kids have started wrecking it already and there aren't swings and things for younger ones. And the nearest one, I think, there is one little one down the hill halfway between here and town but it is in the back of nowhere and it is a bit, you know, I feel a bit dubious about going down there on my own so it tends to be when I have got someone with me who can take me in the car to a park.

Joy's comments illustrate how concerns over safety in the local area may interact with another concern regarding access to transport.

(ii) Public Transport

Parents in Tinbury were particularly likely to refer to problems of using public transport with their children. Joy (Tinbury), who was unable to drive, continued to talk about this issue:

> It is just that most things tend to be so spread out that if you haven't got a car like a lot of people up here, and before (husband) started working we didn't have a car and you have got to plan ahead. You may have to catch two buses to get to the park in (Shaw). Or you have to wait for a day that someone can give you a lift or wait till it was a fine day and walk down. There isn't in the

> locality, places for you to go just on the spur of the moment, you have always got to think how am I going to get there and is it suitable to go today.

Christine (Tinbury) was also unable to drive meaning that she was reliant on her husband for her transport needs. Without his support in driving her around to meet a busy schedule, she would have been unable to continue her own work and study. Christine felt that it was too stressful trying to use public transport with young children:

> Oh, if you take a bus to town and the bus doesn't take a buggy, you have to put the buggy down and you are trying to watch the baby. I have done it once and I am not doing it again. So if I need town I will wait until my husband can take me.

Sally (Tinbury) did not drive and spoke of the difficulties of taking her child shopping without a car:

> ..sometimes I find it really hard to go to (supermarket), just me and (child), and sometimes (supermarket) won't hold the pushchair for me and things like that....There is nowhere to put it. You have got to try and push a trolley with one hand and, because I haven't got a car, I can't leave the pushchair in the car and put (child) in the trolley.

In this regard she missed the loss of the shopper's creche that had been provided by the nearby Leisure Centre until its closure.

Rashida (Crossland) was unable to drive and as reported in the last chapter had given up driving lessons on the advice of her husband's family when she was pregnant. She regretted this and felt that poor transport links contributed to her isolation at home saying "I think it is so much handier if the mother can drive because the mother is more in the house with the child than the father".

There appeared to be a link between maternal depression and social isolation and lack of access to private transport. Bronwen (Tinbury) felt that her life had improved since getting her own car and said:

> Especially where Tinbury is, before I had the car, I was either walking or waiting an age for buses. Basically everything was just hard work. Going shopping, that was impossible.

These responses reveal that improved public transport and the expansion of more local services for parents and children could enhance family well being.

(iii) Indoor leisure and play facilities: the closure of the Leisure Centre

> There is lots of things if the weather is good- we have the beach, the cycle paths, Blackpill, Clyne. A few parks. When it comes to a pouring, rainy,wet day, then there is nothing. Excel Wales has closed down, the Leisure Centre has closed. (Diane, Crossland)

Many parents felt that Swansea was lacking in a choice of affordable and accessible indoor leisure activities. When asked about where they would go with their children when the weather was poor, some parents mentioned going to the cinema, ten- pin bowling and the soft play areas. However, parents on modest incomes commented on how expensive this could be:

> ..the covered in play places up in the Leisure Centre or in Llansamlet, it is a couple of pounds to get in, in the first place and it is a good distance to get to as well. (Joy, Tinbury)

> If you have got more than one child, two or three children, then going to places with them is expensive. If you go swimming, and you pay for each child and for yourself, it is expensive. There should be more cheaper stuff to do. (Margaret, Tinbury)

Some of my interviews took place in the period following the closure of Swansea Leisure Centre in November 2003. Although, my interview schedule did not include a question on this many parents referred to it. Many parents had made considerable use of the Leisure Centre and were disappointed that it had closed. Altogether ten parents (6 in Tinbury, 3 in Crossland and 1 in Shaw) referred to the closure:

> I used to use the Leisure Centre. There are not that many sporting activities for children in Swansea. You cannot do it at home. The Leisure Centre was a place that we used to go to regularly but it has closed down now. It is a big disappointment because children need stimulating with sports. (Aalam, Crossland)

Some parents mentioned the wide range of activities that they had been able to do with their children at the Leisure Centre, that they felt that had lost much more than another swimming pool:

> ..we used to go swimming and I would use the gym there and we would go to Jolly Roger's. We haven't been swimming since it shut. (Emma, Crossland)

> Well, being a single mum or single parent, there was a lot for single parents. If I want to keep fit, there is no way that I can do it, so I did used to use the Leisure for the creche. And I would go to the gym for an hour, and (daughter) would play with the other children and then we would go swimming. So we used the Jolly Roger, the creche, the gym, swimming. We used to go to the Tumblies and we used to pop over there sometimes and just use the café as they did quite nice dinners there. (Diane, Crossland)

> You know if you go somewhere, wanted to go to the gym for an hour, if he could go to a creche? They used to do that in the Leisure Centre but it is closed down now and there is nowhere else for him to go like that...they should do other things, somewhere else. Because I used to like going to the gym. It made me feel like I was doing something for myself. I don't get a chance now. (Sally, Tinbury)

In the cases quoted above, all three mothers are lone parents who evidently used the Leisure Centre to get some respite and time for themselves. Sally, especially, stressed

that there should be somewhere else for parents to leave their children for an hour or two.

(iv) Respecting Diversity

Parents from the Bangladeshi community (all living in Crossland ward) were asked to reflect on whether they felt that the range of services for parents and children (childcare, early years education, leisure) respected their religious, cultural and linguistic needs. Many of the parents had very positive comments about their local primary schools in this regard:

> The school has a high proportion of ethnic minority communities so everyone is aware of different cultures and things like that. They make an effort to do school assemblies on different themes and things like that. So it is really good. It meets the needs of different communities. (Zeena)

Aalam, whose children went to a different primary school to Zeena's son, said that he felt the school respected Islam:

> The school is providing Muslim children with Halal food and other specific needs for the Muslim community. (Aalam)

However, Hameeda, whose child was too young to go to school, said that she was concerned that children were not getting sufficient opportunities to learn their mother tongue in state schools and to study a community language up to Advanced level. She felt that Swansea compared unfavourably with her home City in this regard. Aalam also stated a concern about this, saying that the voluntary organisation that he belonged to had recently raised the issue of language teaching with the Minister for Social Justice:

> She said there has to be a demand so they can provide it to the children who want to learn. But I think it is going to be some time before they decide. The Local Council need to be pushed into doing something, they need to be pushed every time. Every time we bring up a policy to change something, they need to be pushed into it. They never do anything voluntarily. (Aalam)

Farah raised some concerns about the teaching of religious education in schools. Along with the other Bangladeshi parents, she sent her daughter to the Arabic School run by the Mosque every day. However, Farah felt that there was superior provision in this regard in cities with a bigger proportion of minority ethnic groups.

Some of the parents raised concern about poor pupil behaviour and effective teacher discipline in schools generally. Aalam's concerns went further than this, as he felt that his children's peer group and the media were encouraging them to take on values in contradiction to family and religious values:

> When they are asking for material things and it is quite annoying that we cannot provide them with everything they want...They hear about it in school and they come and demand the same thing as their friends have. But we have been brought up to cope with not having materialistic things and we teach the same to our children, but it is hard.

Although Aalam was concerned about peer group pressure, he also held strong views that more efforts should be made to get the different communities in Swansea mixing together:

> They have to learn to start tolerating different people, differences, and that is what the local Council needs to do. There is going to be a large Asian population in this town and there is also going to be other communities. So everyone needs to learn about getting along with differences, but nowadays people are becoming so individualistic. (Aalam)

Sunita talked about her experience of racism and her feeling that she wanted to protect her children from this:

> It is either the scarf or the skin or whatever. Like when we go to the beach you can see the stares. I still take them but, as Muslims, we have to be covered. They don't understand. They do hear but nothing violent or whatever. It does upset me sometimes but I try not to show it as I want them to grow up thinking my way of life can be compatible. (Sunita)

With regard to the use of Leisure facilities, several of the mothers mentioned that they would like the wider availability of single sex swimming, something that would be important to enable them to ensure their children learned to swim:

> There is only one place where they have women swimming facilities and that is at (local) School. On Sundays they have the swimming pool open for an hour for women and children. There are no men there at all and there is a woman lifeguard as well. It is really difficult because it is only on a Sunday and it is only for an hour. (Zeena)

> I would love to use swimming pools. There is one big swimming pool available in Bishop Gore School that they do after school. But for a Muslim mother, there is not much available. (Farah)

(v) 'Somewhere for just an hour': Needing a break from care?

Childcare policy is not geared towards the needs of all parents to have some respite from the parenting role. Parents are generally left to arrange this for themselves, either through paying for a babysitter or through informal support. Those parents that are on a low income or who lack informal support may find it especially hard to get some time alone. Given that expert advice on parenting contained in childcare manuals, web sites for parents and television programmes generally suggests that parents need a rest and time alone in order to parent effectively and to maintain healthy adult relationships, it is disappointing that childcare policy does not address

this issue. This gap appears to contradict claims that childcare policy seeks to meet the interests of children and parents as well as to address the needs of the labour market.

Some parents raised the issue of needing a flexible, short-term care facility. Others suggested that they missed having any leisure time apart from their children but felt morally obliged to look after them. Bronwen (Tinbury), for example, was willing to use formal childcare and informal support in order to work and attend evening classes but did not feel that she had a right to ask for support in order to socialise. She said that she never went out with friends in the evening:

> Perhaps I don't ask for as much help as I could do, as I have got good friends who are always saying, oh, perhaps you should go out...but I feel that unless it is something really important, it is my duty to look after him...When I go to College, that is something important in a way that enjoying myself isn't.

Bronwen's attitudes seem to be informed by moral discourses around the duties involved in motherhood and by prevailing New Labour policy discourses relating to young, single parents that time spent away from children is to improve one's prospects through hard work and study. Childcare and parenting services based on an ethics of care for both children and parents would seek to disrupt these ways of thinking.

Other parents did recognise that parenting was stressful and that they would value an opportunity for a break from it. Rashida (Crossland), for example, was at home full-time and expressed this need for respite:

> Activities like where you can leave your child for one or two hours. I know it is just one hour but at least you can come home and for that hour have time for myself.

Farah (Crossland) worked part-time and made a similar point:

> It is always rush, rush, rush. Now I have to go and cook and clean, the house is a tip. It is just one thing after another. There is no time to relax...Because if I go out, I have to take my kids, so I can't really enjoy myself. ....I would love to have more time for myself, go out and stuff.

Later Farah went on to suggest her needs could be met through more flexible childcare services:

> They are not flexible at all. May be some more mother and toddler groups like the one (local) School are doing, where for a few hours you can leave the child and do things. Rather than the formal thing like (private day nursery).

As mentioned in the previous section a number of parents pointed out that they had used the creche provided by Swansea Leisure Centre in order to "do something for themselves" or to go shopping:

> Well, the other thing about the Leisure Centre is that it provided a shopper's creche. So you could leave your child for an hour and go shopping. (Diane)

> Just a play place for mothers who want to go to the gym and leave them there. It would be good as well to have somewhere for just an hour. You know what I mean? Like a drop in place where they can be looked after or you can play with them. It would be good if they combined a number of things for mothers, all within one central place. It is awkward taking them here and going there. (Sally)

Sally recognised that where this kind of facility was offered, it tended to be in return for parents signing up to study or training:

> I know there are creches in the college but there is a waiting list. Some mothers don't want to go into full-time education but would like somewhere to go and

then if they could have an hour that was flexible...it would be much better for them. (Sally)

A system of support that respects the principle of parental well being could indeed ensure that all parents have access to 'somewhere just for an hour'.

CONCLUSION: RESPECTING DIVERSITY, PROVIDING UNIVERSAL SERVICES

I have examined the parents' relationship to the formal childcare system in relation to the criteria of support, choice and need, rather than in terms of labour market position. Parents' decisions to use formal childcare or to decide not to do so are shaped by a wide range of factors. There are complex moral discourses surrounding motherhood, engagement in paid work and use of childcare (Duncan and Edwards, 1999) and these may vary geographically (Duncan and Smith, 2002). However, my data suggest that geographical variation may be less important than the overwhelming evidence that all mothers seek childcare arrangements that are in tune with their understanding of being a 'good' mother. This is influenced by the ideology of 'sensitive/ intensive mothering' but may be interpreted in different ways by each mother. *All* mothers described their particular arrangements with regard to moral codes and the similarities in the accounts of mothers across the three areas were more striking than the differences. The most significant factor that interacts with these moral positions and with more pragmatic decisions about whether it will be possible to do paid work concerns access to informal care. My evidence suggests that availability of informal care can be seen as a form of gendered social capital and this does seem to vary geographically. It is a form of social capital that enables many

mothers who cannot or will not use formal care to do paid work. It also influences the decisions of those mothers who are willing to make some use of formal care but who wish to limit it or who still need informal help to cover gaps left by incomplete commodification. Those parents that are in paid work without any informal support at all constitute a very small group distinguished largely by being in well-paid professional occupations with flexible working conditions.

The extent to which parents appeared to be satisfied with their arrangements varied considerably in relation to how far they felt they were exercising a choice over the balance between work and care in their lives, and how far they received support and time away from caring. I have suggested that those parents lacking the financial resources to pay for support and time for leisure and those without access to informal networks of support were particularly vulnerable to stress. However, while the childcare market is developed largely to meet the demand created by working parents, the well-being of many parents, whether working or not, may be eroded. Those parents such as Joy and the fathers that I met through Sure Start were very positive about the support for parenting that this Programme had offered them. However, this is targeted provision, not a universal service, leaving other parents whose stories have been told here struggling to cope. It is a sad indictment of service provision in Swansea, that so many parents referred to their regret at losing the Leisure Centre because it allowed them an hour off from the labour involved in caring for children.

The approaches to managing childcare revealed in this study lend support to claims that policy will need to respect diversity in childcare choices and childcare practices

(Bevan Foundation, 2005, Rahilly and Johnston, 2002). My evidence reinforces arguments that policy needs to shift from being prescriptive to being more supportive of parental preferences (Barlow, Duncan and James, 2002; Duncan and Smith, 2002). At the same time some of the inequities in different kinds of provision between the three areas of Swansea considered here are going to continue unless the funding of childcare and the reliance on the market to respond to demand are reviewed. There are strong arguments in favour of a universal childcare service (Land, 2002a; Daycare Trust, 2003). These are issues that local policy-makers and front-line professionals are familiar with, as I illustrated in Chapter Five. At present the childcare market is supported through the gendered networks of social support that I have described. This access to social capital enables individual mothers to plug gaps left by formal care, assuage their anxieties over child safety and continue to play the part of the 'sensitive/ intensive' mother even where they are also in paid work.

CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSION: THE FUTURE OF CHILDCARE POLICY FROM A FEMINIST STANDPOINT

INTRODUCTION

This research has explored the relations between childcare, gender and social policy in Wales following the election of the New Labour Government and the establishment of the Assembly. This concluding chapter has three objectives. First, I will remind the reader of my key findings and relate them to my conceptual framework. Second, I will assess the prospects for *disrupting* the discursive framing of childcare and argue the method of institutional ethnography offers potential here. This argument will be supported with reference to my interviews with policy actors when they were presented with data from my discussions with parents. Finally, I will consider how childcare policy could be developed so that it is 'gender-sensitive' and suggest ways in which feminist claims for 'recognition' and 'redistribution' could be advanced further.

SECTION ONE: REVIEW AND REFLECTIONS

In beginning this research I chose a conceptual framework that I hoped would be able to achieve three goals:

(1) To find out how other mothers felt about and went about 'doing childcare' and how this connected with gender relations. This was informed by my personal

interest in examining my own transition to motherhood through a sociological lens;

(2) To explore childcare and parenting policies in the UK and in Wales in relation to feminist questions about their implications for gender equality;

(3) To use the data gained from the mothers' accounts and from the policy analysis to illuminate how far childcare policy agendas resonate with what mothers, fathers and children in different circumstances may need to safeguard their well being, preferences and access to support.

What my findings reveal is that there may be a tension between meeting mothers' *preferences*, as they are currently expressed, and the advancement of childcare and parenting policy in relation to *feminist claims* for gender equality in both the private and the public realms. I shall argue that this is because claims for *recognition* or *redistribution* have not been fully integrated by femocrats pressing for a gender mainstreaming agenda within government institutions. My findings suggest that childcare policy is not meeting all parents' needs and preferences or advancing the cause of gender equality.

I will remind the reader of the main findings in relation to the three areas identified. The main aspects of my conceptual framework are highlighted to indicate how key concepts linked together.

(a) The mothers' accounts

Using *feminist standpoint theory* and *institutional ethnography* (Smith, 1988) to *begin with* the mothers' accounts and link their childcare practices to wider ideologies, discourses and institutional structures illuminated the resilience of gendered cultural practices, that is the *gender culture* evident in this area of Wales. These cultural practices are shaped by *relations of ruling* and the *gender order* and are also mediated by *local social networks*. The ideology of *sensitive/ intensive mothering* supports patriarchal and capitalist interests by placing women as the primary carers and representing this as 'natural' and 'moral' so that the contribution of care to society is undervalued and unrewarded. Like Hays (1996) I found that *all* the mothers in my research tried to meet the expectations of the sensitive/ intensive mother. They were also actively engaged in 'self-surveillance' (Lawler, 2000) in the conduct of mothering. However, because of differences in their material circumstances and access to networks of social support, some were more easily able to meet these expectations than others. Both *economic capital* and *social capital* are thus important in enabling mothers to meet their ideal of good mothering. The mothers that lack these resources may be especially vulnerable to stress and feelings of guilt.

The sample was drawn from three contrasting areas of Swansea in order to explore claims that mothers' value systems or *gendered moral rationalities* may vary geographically. My evidence showed that *all* mothers make choices in relation to moral codes and that these choices reproduced (more or less) gendered divisions of

labour. Similarities between mothers from different social class and ethnic backgrounds in wanting to 'be there' for their children were striking. Hence these similarities between mothers demonstrate that wider ideologies and discourses may be more significant in understanding the conduct of mothering than local cultural practices. Nevertheless, mothers in the three areas did differ broadly in their access to material wealth (economic capital) and social support from family, friends and neighbours (social capital). These resources do make a difference to mothers' childcare strategies, their use of informal and formal childcare and thus their capacity to mother in a way that resonates with their moral codes. It should also be noted that these moral codes are expressed not only in relation to gendered norms but also in relation to concerns for *children's safety*. This is a concern expressed by fathers as well as mothers and varies by area because there *are* differences between areas in levels of crime and access to transport and safe amenities. It seems that the concern to keep children safe that was particularly expressed by parents in the more materially deprived areas (Crossland and Tinbury) may then connect to a distrust of letting children go into formal childcare. Whilst this distrust of formal childcare seemed to be treated as a cultural peculiarity by some policy actors, it seems to me that it is based on rational criteria. However, it must be acknowledged that the sample of parents in each area was small and that they could not be seen to be necessarily representative of other parents in their area. In this sense I cannot offer firm conclusions regarding the significance of gendered moral rationalities (value systems) in terms of geographical variation.

(b) Childcare and parenting policy.

The method of institutional ethnography enabled me to link the mothers' accounts with wider ideologies and discourses related to *relations of ruling* within the state apparatus. In order to explore state agendas in relation to childcare and parenting I analysed policy texts using the concepts of *framing*, *condensation symbols* and the *discursive opportunity structure*. In addition *feminist critical policy analysis* guided my focus on the implications of policy for gender relations. I also studied policy texts at both the UK level and in post-devolution Wales in order to examine the prospects created by devolution for doing things differently in policy terms. Finally, I was able to explore some of the issues raised by this analysis in interviews with policy actors.

My analysis revealed that the framing of policy in relation to *economic* interests is paramount at the UK level and this also limits the scope for the alternative framing of policy in Wales. Policy reveals further ways of packaging childcare needs in relation to promoting *gender equality* (expressed as *work-life balance*), *supporting parents* and meeting *children's needs/ rights*. At the UK level both gender equality/ work-life balance and children's needs are harnessed to the economic frame in terms of social investment for the future. There is also a concern for promoting social inclusion expressed in relation to social integration rather than redistribution of resources and tackling inequalities. The supporting parents frame is also couched in moral terms in terms of ensuring parents meet their responsibilities in raising children to be 'good citizens'. These are discursive frames that may represent a perversion of the issues that policy claims to address.

In Wales, childcare policy is also framed in these ways but some differences were revealed both through policy analysis and in discussion with policy actors. The emphasis on framing childcare in relation to *children's needs/ rights* is more pronounced. The idea of children having rights of citizenship is stronger than at the UK level and the creation of the Office of the Commissioner for Children for Wales is of huge symbolic importance in this regard. This framing has provided a space in the *discursive opportunity structure* through which children's organisations in Wales have been able to press for childcare as a *universal right* for all children rather than merely a means to support the welfare to work agenda. My analysis shows that there is some sympathy for these claims within the Assembly but there are constraints in meeting them in practice given the nature of the devolution settlement. There is also evidence that issues of tackling poverty, promoting social inclusion and advancing social justice are understood in different ways in Wales. The *condensation symbols* (e.g social inclusion, tackling child poverty) remain the same but the *discursive framing* is more tied in with concerns over inequality and the need to redistribute resources. This alternative framing is significant because it leaves open a door within the discursive opportunity structure as social movement organisations continue to press their demands.

Whilst this greater awareness in Wales of the need to tackle social class inequalities is to be welcomed, there is the danger that gender has fallen out of the picture. Despite the Statutory Duty, support for gender mainstreaming and the entry of femocrats into the Assembly, my research found little evidence that the connections between childcare and gender relations had been addressed. Childcare policy is

assumed to improve gender equality because it enables women to do paid work. At best this ties with a liberal feminist agenda for equal rights in the public realm. This ignores the connections between women's place in the private realm and their capacity to enjoy the achievements of liberal feminism in the public realm. The *differences* between women in relation to this capacity are sidelined leaving middle-class, professional women as the main winners in this game. The femocrats that have entered the Assembly and regional policy bodies are those able to play according to liberal feminist rules and have made advances in the public realm. It has been possible for some women to gain from gender equality legislation and policy whilst leaving the gender order and local gender cultures intact. It is thus possible to see how feminism may have failed in its capacity to speak for 'ordinary women'. I have moved from a position as a single woman with no children where I was able to benefit from the achievements of liberal feminism in the (professional) workplace to finding that professional workplace does not engage with the position of mothers such as myself. In addition mothers have other institutions (schools, health services) with which we have to engage on behalf of our children and these continue to encourage us to be true to the ideology of sensitive/ intensive mothering. As a result of my transition to motherhood I have thus moved from having sympathy with the femocrats' agenda to achieve independence for women through paid work to feeling sidelined by this narrow interpretation of equality. It does not fully address my needs or those of most of the mothers who participated in this research. In this sense the statutory duty and gender mainstreaming in Wales are not being pushed to their full potential so that cultural and economic recognition for unpaid care is secured. Unless this recognition is forthcoming then a real redistribution of resources between women and men across different socio-economic groups will remain a dream.

Claims that childcare can advance gender equality sit alongside the discursive framing of childcare in relation to supporting (regulating) parents in which the parents' role in playing with their children, spending time with them and supporting their education is paramount. This is a discursive frame that is in tune with the ideology of sensitive/ intensive mothering and yet may be in tension with the economic goal of encouraging women to do paid work and to do it for longer hours. In this sense different discursive frames may be in tension. The mothers' accounts revealed that they were far more influenced by this agenda for effective/ involved parenting than they were by the agenda to seek equality through paid work. The way that the mothers seek to resolve the conflict between the demands of sensitive/ intensive mothering and the economic need, for most of them, to do some paid work is through accessing informal social support. Those mothers that do paid work entirely on the basis of using commodified childcare are a very small group indeed and still face stresses in doing so. My findings thus reveal that unpaid care done mainly by women supports the institutions of the state, the economy and the education system twice over! First, because of the unpaid care done in the home by mothers. Second, because where those mothers also do paid work it is often on the basis of using the unpaid childcare offered by their own mothers and other female relations, friends and neighbours to cover the gaps while they are away from the home.

This analysis thus revealed that the availability of informal care is often crucial for enabling the commodified childcare market to work at all. These findings support Hilary Land's claim that the 'sharp distinction made by policy makers between

formal and informal care' (2002b: 15) is misguided. Gendered networks of social support enable mothers to plug gaps in childcare and engage in social and emotional capital building (Edwards and Gillies, 2005). These are networks that are built around educational, parent support and early years facilities helping to explain the prominence of education in the accounts mothers gave of their role in childcare. The mothers' experiences are 'socially organized' (Smith, 1997: 393) through these networks. These are networks that *exclude* as well as include leaving some mothers isolated and vulnerable. Access to these networks may help women participate in paid work and yet for others may lead them to choose to *limit* work in favour of care. Sheila provided the most striking example of this in wishing to limit her professional, paid work in education in order to be able to volunteer in her child's school. She wanted to be able to engage in this form of social capital building and to provide emotional capital by 'being there' for her child.

(c) Tensions Between Mothers' Preferences and Childcare Policy Frames

At this point it is worth taking stock of some of the tensions that my evidence has pointed towards. Mothers do show that they are engaging with the ideology of 'sensitive/ intensive mothering' whilst shaping how they do this according to their circumstances. Whilst most mothers still take main responsibility for domestic labour there are some who are seeking to share this with partners. Yet mothers may operate a division between domestic labour and the practical, educational and emotional labour involved with childcare. They are less likely to share this with partners although they may seek support from other women if they need to do so. There is a sense then that many women still wish to be the primary carers in relation to their

children and this often remains a 'female-only' space. Yet at the same time mothers' wishes are expressed in a way in which this is so 'taken-for-granted' that it goes unrecognised. These preferences may create tensions in relation to the framing of childcare policy in terms of enabling women to do paid work and to achieve equality in the public realm. Yet these preferences *do* resonate with those discursive frames relating to supporting 'good' parenting and to meeting children's needs. These are discursive frames that can be read through the lens of the ideology of 'sensitive/ intensive mothering'. Hence these frames may be doing more to *reinforce* mothers' sense of responsibility for putting children first and being there for them. Where mothers live in areas where community and child safety is a particular issue, a sense of risk may reinforce the view that childcare must come before paid work. Hence, my evidence reveals a more complex picture than first anticipated. It is more than a problem of policy seeking to achieve a goal (more mothers in paid work) that conflicts with traditional cultural practices or gendered moral rationalities. Certain discursive frames *promoted by the state* also tie in with those cultural practices. Hence these are cultural practices that are being *recreated* in relation to new discursive frames; they are not simply entrenched attitudes based in the past. This leads to the next Section where I discuss these issues with policy actors.

SECTION TWO: HEARING PARENTS, DISRUPTING POLICY?

My research has used concepts such as the relations of ruling, the ideology of sensitive/ intensive mothering and discursive framing to suggest social practices are tied into institutionalised capitalist and patriarchal interests. As a sociologist I have generally lent towards frameworks that emphasise structure and control over agency

and freedom. As a mother I genuinely *feel* the grip of relations of ruling that force me into particular ways of being a mother so that my children do not lose out. Yet I also recognise that there is some diversity in parenting practices and that there must be some scope for disrupting policy discourses, cultural practices and suggesting ways of doing things differently. The intention behind using the method of institutional ethnography was to use the mothers' accounts as a basis for exposing gaps between their preferences and needs and what was being offered through childcare policy. In this section I explore this potential for disrupting policy through my interviews with policy actors. These were conducted *after* I had completed fieldwork with parents. The policy interviews provided an opportunity to discuss some of the themes from the parent interviews that pointed to issues with which policy could engage. I wanted to explore how far policy actors were aware of these issues and how far they were able to respond to parental concerns. Policy actors occupy an interesting position in that they have some power to reshape policy and yet they may also be tied into wider relations of ruling through their location within the state, political parties and professional organisations.

It has been argued that policy discourses frame the childcare agenda in particular ways and policy actors appeared to be operating within dominant frames whilst drawing from them in ways that resonated with their role and professional/ political values. However, by using data from the parent interviews, it was possible to reveal gaps between particular ways of framing policy and what is happening in practice. In this way I was trying to use the method of 'institutional ethnography' to grasp parents' daily experiences and to use this to disrupt childcare policy frames. Some

policy actors responded with enthusiasm to this approach whilst others were rather defensive.

When we assess policy with regard to meeting parental needs and enhancing their well being this throws new light on the framing of childcare in relation to the economy, children's needs, social justice and gender equality. My evidence reviewed in Section One revealed that these frames are all drawn on in policy texts, yet they may be in tension with each other and may not always chime with what parents would like. Following Marshall's call for feminist critical policy analysis to consider 'marginalized populations' (1997: 19) it is my view that parents represent a largely silent interest group in the making of childcare policy in Wales. Whilst new partnership arrangements and duties to consult may start to resolve this and there are localised efforts to secure user involvement, the parents that I interviewed did not feel there were any avenues to make their voice heard. This was a methodology through which I hoped the voices of some parents could be heard.

There were *three* themes from the parent interviews that were discussed with the policy actors.

(a) "Being a good mother"

I have argued that mothers' values and cultural practices are shaped by the ideology of sensitive/ intensive mothering. This ideology may conflict with the economic framing of childcare, willingness to use commodified care and encouragement for women to enter the labour market. Even where mothers are in paid work, they will

still make accommodations in order to remain true to their understanding of the maternal role. I have argued that policy texts only approach gender roles in relation to role equity and work-life balance considerations. Yet the moral economy of care and the contribution of unpaid caring labour to the political economy are not addressed. This was an ideal opportunity to ask policy actors directly for their views on this matter.

The two actors from regional gender equality bodies seemed to be uneasy in talking about the issue of mothers' own preferences. Alison Connor (Regional Equality Body One) did not accept a preference to be home as a credible position for mothers to adopt. Whilst explaining that her organisation was 'centring the agenda around choice', her own view was that there should not be a choice because:

> While there is a choice and men earn more than women, it will always be a choice that the women stay at home...and you are never going to break the cycle.....when you compare with international experience, it is a cultural thing, where it has become the norm that all children go into some kind of formal childcare...there is much wider acceptance that is how children grow up.

This is a perspective that is, perhaps, to be expected from a policy actor campaigning for improved formal childcare provision. Simon Duncan and his colleagues comment on the validity of arguments from reformers 'that child care preference is a circular process where, if mothers had more experience of formal provision, they would rate it more highly' (2004: 263). They argue that their interviews with mothers about childcare revealed that these claims oversimplify how choices are reached. Rather 'Child care evaluations are one part of mothers' value systems, and in turn these emerge in specific social and geographical contexts''(2004: 263). I provided some examples from my own data to illustrate this point. I referred to mothers who had

been in professional jobs and yet stated a preference to stay home for a time with their children either because they felt morally obliged to do so or because they had found this to be more enjoyable than work. Alison Connor responded "Saying that, it is needs driven, isn't it?" citing the lack of access to well-paid employment and affordable childcare as the reason why these preferences were expressed. However, this conflicts with my evidence that some women in well-paid professional jobs living in areas that were well provided for in terms of formal childcare (such as Becky) or with access to generous informal care (such as Sheila) *still* stated a preference to be at home. This policy actor held strong views that paid work was good for women and would not accept that my evidence was valid. Her entrenched attitude did not engage with the 'gendered moral rationalities' revealed in my research seeing them as merely outmoded attitudes:

> ..because the Government has said you will go out to work and here is the provision and actually we are still caught in this trap of it is best for children to be home with mummy.

Alison Connor was also in disagreement with work-life balance initiatives that enabled some mothers to choose part-time work on the grounds that this was in conflict with advancing gender equality:

> A lot of that is arguments around the business case...my personal view is actually that part-time working is a big contributor to the pay gap and actually providing choice has not solved the problem.

This view sees the extension of 'choice' for parents as a barrier to achieving gender equality and redistribution of care between women and men. Yet, my view is that surely this example points to the need for more vigorous policies to ensure part-time working does not lead to disadvantage in pay and conditions, rather than to suggest

that the choice to work part-time should be limited. This policy actor's view is that if women are to achieve claims that connect with a politics of redistribution this will mean sacrificing claims based on a politics of recognition (Fraser, 1997). As I shall argue in Section Three, the problem is that claims for recognition are treated as mutually exclusive from claims for redistribution.

Liz Spencer (Gender Equality Body 2) believed policy should provide choice for parents and stressed that the role of her organisation was around ensuring a genuine choice was available for women:

> ..because we are not an agency that says all women must work full-time and they must all become managing directors, of course we are not saying that. Just talking about the opportunity and the information and the choice.
>
> So anybody who wants to stay at home with one child or however many children for whatever period of time, fantastic. If there is an opportunity to keep in touch with the world of study, the world of work, the wider community, then those are the sorts of things that (my agency) would be interested in making sure to offer as much choice and as many options as possible to women...

Liz Spencer's organisation is geared towards achieving role equity for women and men and enabling women to return to the labour market, and fulfils a very valuable role in this regard. Yet this does mean that the main focus is on those women who do paid work outside the home, but this does not engage with those mothers who may value recognition for work done at home in terms of financial support, respite and advice.

Other policy actors believed that there should be choice and respect for cultural preferences. Some were in favour of providing support through a redistribution of resources for those wishing to extend the time they stayed home with their children:

....it is more of a Gordon Brown issue than our issue, but I do agree with you that there is a substantial minority of women that, and it is women predominantly, that feel bad about going to work, certainly for the first 12 or 18 months and that an awful lot of women are going to work earlier and that is simply because of pure economic pressure. You know it isn't their preferred choice but they just have to do it because of the reality of their economic circumstances.

So, I do think ideally, and whether there is an issue of affordability...there is a need for more extended maternity leave that would take some pressure off parents. I think there is a political argument, there is an evidence based argument for children. (Keith Hall, Assembly Member)

I firmly believe that if parents want to stay at home and look after their children then there should be an incentive. (Rita Daniels, Officer/ EYDCP)

Policy actors thus held a variety of perspectives. Some wanted cultural recognition and resources such as extended maternity leave for parents caring for their children at home. They wanted parents to be enabled to stay home with their children if this was their preference. Others believed that cultural preferences that leave the gendered division of labour intact needed to be challenged and that this might mean limiting choice. Yet all perspectives operate by favouring either claims for cultural recognition or claims for a redistribution of resources. What is needed is a way of integrating these claims and I return to this in Section Three.

(b) Stress and respite- struggling to cope

The research revealed that there was little childcare available for the purpose of providing respite other than for parents identified by professionals as failing to cope. The notion that parents should be entitled to support for childcare for a wider variety of reasons than work or training and that caring at home is demanding and stressful work is overlooked. Policy actors were asked to comment on the availability of

childcare to offer respite to parents. Some agreed that there was a gap in provision here:

> It is very difficult, not just in this, but in child protection and in health, transport, everything really, that by the time that you tackle the front line, there is not an awful lot left for upstream activities....we have got to deliver public services and in terms of affordability, people won't pay enough taxes to allow that sort of activity to take place. (Keith Hall, Assembly Member)

Policy actors may thus be acutely aware of particular gaps that are obscured in policy texts and these gaps are of concern to them. Debra Mason commented on the fact that people have to be seen to be in desperate circumstances before they could get help:

> In terms of respite, social services has an initiative called community childcare, but that can only be supported if health visitors are involved or social workers are involved and the parents are on income support. If there are issues of depression or parents have their child on the child protection register, then there is an initiative, but it is not self-referral, it has to be with professional help. (Debra Mason, Officer/EYDCP)

Erica Bell, a Sure Start Officer, also noted that it would be difficult for parents on low incomes to get respite without professional support:

> I know the (local community creche) has got a childcare presence but again it is cost and sometimes we would sponsor places there through the community childminders scheme for parents to get respite.....although the (local creche) is great in terms of its childcare, I don't know what its daily costs are for parents who just feel they need a break or whatever.

Some policy actors did acknowledge the stresses facing all parents and did not necessarily agree with the emphasis on childcare for paid work:

> We haven't got childcare right and I think it has been badly influenced by the feminist movement and it has been badly influenced by the work ethic, just getting more and more people into employment. And that is going to be the

> women which has all kinds of other implications about longer term career prospects for women but childcare...and we have got it quite wrong, actually. I have always been uneasy about, I mean, just the pure time..my son hardly ever slept, my daughter, she was fine, she slept a lot, but the sheer tiredness and there were two of us. (Chris Coleman, Senior Officer)

If childcare policy is to be directed towards the needs of children and parents there should be an extension of childcare to support all parents in gaining some respite. This would provide help before people reach the point of crisis and in turn would help to move away from notions that those who find themselves in crisis are 'bad parents' who are thus stigmatised. At present the childcare market leaves a substantial proportion of parents without any support whatsoever. This is a fragmented and divisive approach to childcare policy. Policy actors are aware that this leaves gaps yet they have to work within the framework devised at the national level. This reveals that policy actors may also question certain policy frames on the basis of their own experience of parenting or their professional practice.

(c) Misgivings about formal childcare

Some mothers held strong views that formal childcare would not be in their child's best interests. I presented evidence to policy actors that some mothers felt they would not trust a formal childcare facility and valued the availability of informal care. This is an issue that has been considered in the childcare policy arenas in Wales (Bevan Foundation, 2005; WAG, 2005a). The views of parents on this matter were well known to policy actors and they have been seeking ways to take parental misgivings into account. In the Interim Report of the WAG Childcare Working Group it is stated:

> Due to lack of accessible, affordable childcare provision in Wales, informal childcare- provided by family and friends- is often the only childcare option available to parents. But for many parents, informal care is a positive and preferred choice, often being cheaper, more flexible and trustworthy. (WAG, CWG, 2004: 5, Para 3.2)

In my interviews a number of policy actors raised this as an issue:

> ..people who are economically inactive are in the more socially excluded communities and are suspicious of formal childcare, apart from problems of access and so forth. So if part of this is that childcare is one of the barriers that some people have to overcome to get into work but if the childcare that we are offering them is formal childcare isn't what they want or don't trust or don't believe in, then how do we develop policies in line with their aspirations and what is acceptable to them? (Keith Hall, Assembly Member)

> This group of parents or grandparents would not consider a paid for childcare facility, either because they could not afford to or would not choose to spend what money they had that way. They would consider community based childcare that was either free or very low cost but only if they knew the person who was running it and only if they "liked/ trusted them", wouldn't necessarily worry whether that person was registered... (Liz Spencer, Equality Body 2)

> Cultural differences in Wales mean that they have less trust in formal childcare and more reliance on the extended family and the grandparents.... (Alison Connor, Equality Body 1)

Whilst some policy actors referred to this issue as another example of cultural preferences that might need to be shifted, there were others who were also questioning whether a transition to leaving children in formal childcare was desirable:

> Well, I feel there should be equal opportunity. On the one hand, I am all for it. But these are my reservations. It could create a scenario where children are pushed from pillar to post and I am not happy with that. Because you could argue, well, my child has childcare, full day or wrap-around. It could mean dropping the child off at seven to a neighbour and then being taken to a Centre. The Centre then takes the child to school. Two and a half hours in nursery, the child is picked up back to a Centre, you know it can be a very long day for some children..which I don't think is quality and I am concerned about that. (Rita Daniels, Officer/EYDCP)

> So perhaps two days with one grandparent, another day with another grandparent and the last part of the week in a nursery or with a childminder. The poor child is overwhelmed by all these carers, that is the other thing that we need to be aware of. (Debra Mason, Officer/EYDCP)

> Yes, OK, it is quite good if you can go out to work and solve the poverty line but then on the other hand you are not there for the children. It is the balance that I think is important although I would be the last to condemn any parent who feels that they need to go out to work. And I suppose it boils down to the quality of where the child is while the parents are out working. (Paul Waters, Children's Organisation)

Discursive frames that celebrate the interests of children may be articulated by parents, policy actors and professionals to suggest that formal childcare or at least too much formal childcare may not always be desirable for children. I had not anticipated that some policy actors and professionals would also articulate the unease over the use of formal childcare expressed by some parents. It seems that the 'children's needs' frame has the capacity to be in tension with the economic and gender equality frames. Different actors are located in different positions within the institutional relations of ruling and will utilise those discursive frames that resonate most closely with their values and professional practices. By starting from the accounts of parents about how they manage childcare, how they feel about it and what their preferences are, it is possible to *disrupt* the discourses and encourage policy actors to reveal their own understandings about the limits of policy. Despite the emphases of policy texts, actors had their own reservations about certain aspects of policy, were aware of some of the significant gaps in what was on offer for parents and knew that the frames that they were adopting could be contested. These findings connect with an understanding of the state as a 'site of struggle' in which 'discursive strategies' play a part in defining problems and their solutions, yet in which 'material

conditions and institutional structures' (Tickell and Peck, 1996: 603) contain the debate.

Feminist standpoint theory, 'institutional ethnography' and 'feminist critical policy analysis' have proved powerful tools in this research. I have been able to place gender at the centre of policy analysis, and to link what mothers and fathers do, day to day, in specific material circumstances to a wider web of discursive and institutional relations. It has also been possible to place policy actors working within different parts of the state apparatus within this understanding of the 'institutional'. Smith's understanding of the power of 'textually mediated discourse' (1990b: 163) has been supported in regard to the shaping of the social practices relating to parenting and to meeting children's needs. Yet there seems to be more conflict between the discursive framing of childcare in relation to economic interests and gender equality and parents' preferences. Some policy actors and social movement organisations also contest these frames. This raises important questions regarding the prospects for respecting cultural preferences whilst at the same time pursuing a feminist agenda.

SECTION THREE: TOWARDS GENDER-SENSITIVE CHILDCARE POLICY

This research has endeavoured to bring a feminist standpoint centre-stage in understanding the connections between childcare policy, gender relations and parents' 'childcare strategies' (Windebank, 1999). Fiona Williams makes a case for the 'importance of finding ways in which feminism informs a wider political agenda,

while not losing touch with its own particular and changing history' (Williams, 2002: 505). The feminist voices influencing the making of childcare policy in Wales are limited mainly to the femocrats who are insiders within the Assembly or who work as close partners and who appear to favour a liberal feminist agenda. I have argued that this will not meet the needs of all women and will neglect the issue of unpaid care, who does it and how it could be redistributed. Following Smith (1988) I firmly believe that feminist knowledge must be grounded in an understanding of women's and men's daily lives under specific social conditions and in different social locations. In doing so it becomes more possible to understand why the mainstreaming of feminism as another equal opportunities issue by political parties (Williams, 2002) fails to engage fully with what mothers in diverse situations want.

In terms of now suggesting a feminist agenda for childcare in Wales it must be acknowledged that Wales is achieving distinctiveness in its style of governance and political values providing a 'policy window' (Marshall, 1997) for social movement organisations seeking to influence change. The adoption of the Statutory Duty, the gender-balance within the Assembly and the efforts to work in partnership with the voluntary sector and local government exemplify this point. Yet there is little evidence of feminist movements pressing for change in the childcare arena meaning that femocrats within the Assembly and partner organisations may be the only ones considering gender at all. My interviews with regional policy actors revealed that they were mainly working within the terms defined by New Labour and were focused on role equity consideration in terms of gender. However, by pressing for role equity and independence through paid work for women, reformers do not engage with how many mothers experience combining paid work and care. It is my view that

mothers' values, preferences and experiences do need to be understood as a basis for moving policy forward. It is not acceptable and is in fact incorrect to merely treat those preferences as old-fashioned cultural norms that must be eroded. As I have argued there are aspects of parenting and education policy that may be reinforcing mothers' feelings that they must be there for their children and which are creating new forms of unpaid labour. Among local policy actors, on the other hand, there was little evidence that gender was a major concern, although there was awareness of the pressures facing mothers, fathers and children in poor communities and the need to be responsive to cultural diversity and its interaction with gendered norms. In this case gendered cultural preferences are taken for granted and some professionals (teachers, nursery workers, community workers, health visitors) may reinforce this through their own gendered values. This is also problematic.

Childcare policy in Wales has thus been limited by a very narrow understanding of the connections between gender and childcare, based on role equity in paid work. The value of unpaid care has been neglected and the adoption of a gender-neutral discourse evades attention to the ideologies/ discourses/ social conditions of motherhood and their implications for policy. In addition, attention to gender equality has been overshadowed because both the Assembly and activists in Wales have used the children's needs/ children's rights discursive frame as a powerful condensation symbol. This has proved far more potent than concern for gender equality. Celebration of children's rights is a discursive frame that can secure consensus in a way that feminist claims for recognition and redistribution will not. There is a need for the Assembly, partner organisations and local government to give as much attention to gender equality as I have showed they are paying to supporting

children and young people. There needs to be much deeper engagement with what needs to be done to advance gender equality. This will mean moving beyond the narrow liberal feminist agenda focused on providing routes into paid work.

The weaknesses of childcare policy in regard to gender equity can also be revealed if we turn to the question regarding who benefits from care policies and who loses out (F.Williams, 2001). The benefits offered through current childcare policies include childcare and working tax credits for those able to engage in paid work, the expansion of childcare places in response to parental demand, limited subsidised childcare and early years provision in particular areas and work-life balance initiatives in some areas of employment. Many of the mothers had been able to access some of these benefits but this was dependent on a complex combination of other factors outside the realms of policy and sometimes outside the control of the mother. Paradoxically, the ability for some mothers to be able to take advantage of work-life balance packages allowing career breaks and part-time working was dependent on having a partner in well-paid full-time employment. Both Becky and Sheila provide examples of this. It can be argued that their choices leave them vulnerable in future stages of the life course, should their marriage end, their husband lose his job or when their children achieve independence. These are thus work-life balance 'benefits' that may disadvantage women for the future. The capacity to benefit from the expansion of formal childcare interacted with geographical location, access to transport and ability to pay, alongside willingness to utilise this form of care. Some mothers had benefited from the introduction of tax credits, in Farah's case, for example, this had enabled her to move from full-time to part-time hours. Some of the lone mothers had also found that this meant that engaging in paid work

was possible. However, for many mothers, engagement in paid work was heavily dependent on the availability of informal care either to complement formal childcare or as the only form of childcare they would use.

There is thus a powerful case for assessing the issue of who benefits and who loses in relation to the contribution of *informal childcare*. Once again this supports Smith's (1988) claims that institutional structures such as education and employment rely on the unpaid care of women. Behind many working mothers are grandmothers and others providing unpaid labour to make this possible (Lewis and Giullari, 2005). It is necessary to explore the connections between divisions of labour in employment and divisions of labour at home and within wider networks of social support. What is needed are social policies that seek to work through the *connections* between the private and the public spheres, and between commodified childcare and informal support networks. This evidence supports feminist claims that there is a need to shift the emphasis of New Labour on engagement in paid work as the route to citizenship (Lister, 1997; Williams, 2002). This sidelines care instead of respecting its value and stigmatises those who are not able to do paid work. As Fiona Williams observes:

> ....constructing those in paid work as independent fails to recognize that a paid worker's independence is actually achieved through hidden systems of support by those who care for that worker's children, clean his/her house, buy and cook his/her food and so on. (2002: 507)

Although care has been put on the agenda by New Labour through initiatives such as the National Childcare Strategy, the Work-Life Balance campaign and the National Carers' Strategy, the ethic of paid work remains paramount.

There is growing support for developing an alternative understanding of citizenship and the principles underpinning social policy in terms of a political ethics of care (Kittay, 2001; Lister, 2002; Sevenhuijsen, 2002; F.Williams, 2001). These arguments recognise the value of care to society and insist that models of citizenship must incorporate caring. Feminist contributors to this literature agree that the 'fetishism of the work ethic' (Lister, 2002: 524) by New Labour must be challenged, yet some remain wary of moving too far from claims based in 'equality' towards those based on 'difference':

> The response of some has been to swing the pendulum back towards a position associated more with difference feminism, emphasizing the importance of care and women's right to choose to stay at home to provide care. In the process, in some instances, we may be losing sight of the value- social and psychological as well as economic- of paid work for many women and not just those in what we might categorize as 'more interesting' jobs. (Lister, 2002: 524)

Lister's concern is that this position could give rise to social polices such as home care allowances for parents that reinforce the gendered division of labour and class divisions, as it would be women in lower paid jobs who would be the most likely to take advantage of these benefits. It was on the grounds of her belief in paid work as the route to women's independence that Lister supported the proposal of the Commission on Social Justice that lone parents on welfare benefits should be obliged to be available for work once their children reached a certain age. In her view, this would be reasonable, provided that an appropriate infrastructure was in place including childcare, family-friendly employment policies and suitable employment and training opportunities. Lister concedes that at present the UK is 'a long way from achieving the kind of social and economic infrastructure, which should be a precondition of requiring the lone parents of older children to be available for paid work' (2002: 528-529).

I referred to Lister's position in Chapter One and explained that I take a different stance. Whilst I agree that social policy must embrace an 'ethics of care', my understanding of what this would mean is different from Lister for the following reasons. First, I agree with Fiona Williams (2002) that a political ethic of care must be based on a respect for the principle of 'voice' in which those who use welfare services are able to express their needs because:

> ...people themselves can develop and share their own forms of knowledge and care. What this challenges is the power of expert knowledge to monopolize the definition of what is wrong with us and what we need to right it. (F.Williams, 2002: 516)

The principle of voice is one that fits comfortably with the method of 'institutional ethnography' and would mean that mothers and fathers like those that I interviewed would be involved in naming what kind of policies would help them. In my view the 'expert knowledge' upon which Lister based her claim to know what was in the long-term best interests of lone mothers, would be replaced by the lay knowledge of those best placed to speak about the social conditions in which they care. Social policy needs to be grounded in an appreciation of these everyday material circumstances rather than directed towards an ideal typical model. Second, Lister has not moved fully away from the dualism between 'paid work' and 'care' that she has been seeking to reconcile. Yet it is fundamental that this dualism is eroded if the labour involved in caring is to achieve parity of recognition with the labour involved in paid work. Parity of recognition will also entail a significant redistribution of resources. A redistribution of caring labour between men and women is more likely to be achieved in this context.

Once those who do unpaid care are *recognised* in relation to their massive contribution to society and are rewarded accordingly, *everything that we take for granted will begin to shift.* In my view the gendered division of labour will be encouraged to change once informal care gains proper recognition in terms of social respect and allocation of resources. These rewards would include adequate payment for the labour involved and the expansion of universal public services to enable those who care to have a choice over if and how they do so, and for whatever period of time feels right for their circumstances:

> To say that the care of dependents must be recognized as work is to say that it must be included within a system of cooperation wherein it is adequately compensated and given the same status and social standing as any legitimate employment. (Kittay, 2001: 544)

The feminist claim that women achieve economic independence through participation in paid work is merely a description of how things are in a society that does not value and reward care as a form of labour. In order to care in circumstances in which this did not lead to dependency, financial loss and the closing of alternatives for the future, claims for 'redistribution' must be connected with claims for 'recognition'. There would be no need to argue that 'we are doing lone mothers no favours if the social security system signals that they are seen as primarily mothers and not workers until their youngest child is aged 16' (Lister, 2002: 528). Indeed, a real regard for an ethics of care would result in a social welfare system in which lone parents are no longer a specific target of social policy at all because an acceptance of diversity in parenting and intimate relationships (F.Williams, 2002) would be the norm.

An 'ethics of care' must respect the importance of both claims for redistribution and claims for recognition (Fraser, 2001) because 'integral to redistributive questions of who pays and who benefits from welfare programmes is the issue of how services and benefits are delivered and received' (F.Williams, 2002: 505). If care was to be culturally recognised and valued, this would involve a debate about who does it, why it is distributed unequally, and why society could not function if those who care informally chose not to continue. This would also involve recognising why many carers feel strongly that informal care is preferable to commodified care. On this basis the preferences of carers could be respected and taken into account in policies to redistribute resources accordingly. It is my view that policies must simultaneously improve support for carers whilst providing this in a variety of ways so that there are genuine choices. In Chapter One I referred to the example of Finland where parents are given a choice between using municipal childcare, using welfare benefits to purchase a private childcare place, or using those benefits to support informal parent care (Repo, 2004). This is a policy that provides choices, enables parents to exercise their preferences and ensures all are supported through a benefit that can be used in different ways. This appears to me to be a policy that combines recognition for care with redistribution of resources in ways that suit parents. This is a model that combines universalism with choice and support. I would like to see this developed in childcare policy in the UK.

Childcare policy in the UK and in Wales is a long way from promoting gender equality, supporting parents and meeting the interests of all children. Whilst I continue to support feminist claims for a redistribution of labour at home and in paid work, this cannot be 'top-down', imposed or assumed to be furthered simply by

enabling more women to do paid work. There is a need to engage with cultural preferences and the ideologies and discursive frames that continue to inform those preferences whilst simultaneously providing a range of policy options and benefits that mean the choice to care is a respected pathway and can be conducted in a variety of ways. That will be the most powerful way of enabling mothers and fathers to make decisions over how they do childcare, how they want to redistribute the labour that is involved and that ensures whoever does it enjoys financial independence. Like Levitas (2001) I recognise that the alternatives that I am proposing rely on a utopian method. There is nothing to indicate that New Labour in London is prepared to redistribute wealth or revise the policy emphasis on paid work. In this sense the ethic of care proposed by Fiona Williams and others and which informs my proposals may seem idealistic. If devolution and the difference of style and vision evident in Wales mean anything, it will mean offering a space to explore alternatives.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROFILE OF THE THREE ELECTORAL WARDS

SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROFILE OF THE THREE ELECTORAL WARDS [liv]

This profile has been constructed to illuminate some points of contrast between the three wards. However, the need to avoid the identification of the wards has prevented the use of exact figures available in the census.

Crossland lies close to the City Centre and is one of the seven *Communities First* areas in Swansea. It has a higher proportion of people from minority ethnic groups other than white than either Tinbury or Shaw. Those who described their ethnic group as either Asian or Asian British comprise the largest minority ethnic group. Whilst the Census records suggest that the largest proportion of people stated their religion as either Christian or reported no religion, there is a sizeable Muslim population. Over one third of people aged 16 to 74 living in the area stated that they had no qualifications. There is a fairly high proportion of people who are economically inactive. Of those who are economically active, there are more employed in elementary occupations compared with those who are managers or senior officials or in professional occupations. There is a higher proportion of people renting from private landlords than in the other two wards although owner occupation is the most common form of household tenure and there is some Local Authority housing.

Tinbury is also a *Communities First* area and provides a base for several Sure Start projects. With regard to the distribution of ethnic groups, the majority of the population is white and the proportion from minority ethnic groups is the lowest of the three wards. There were very low numbers reporting a religion other than Christianity or stating they had no religion. There was a very high proportion of people (over half) that stated they had no qualifications. There were more people who reported that they were economically inactive compared with economically active. Of those who are in employment, the largest proportion is in elementary occupations compared with a very low proportion who are managers and senior officials or in professional occupations. In relation to household tenure, the rate of owner occupation is comparatively low and over one half of the population are living in Local Authority rented housing. There is a higher proportion of lone parent households than in the other two wards.

Shaw lies to the West of Tinbury and is generally viewed to be more affluent than either Crossland or Tinbury. There is a lower proportion of people of minority ethnic origin than in Crossland but more than in Tinbury. Those who are recorded as Asian or Asian British represent the largest minority ethnic group. Most people recorded their religion as being Christian, or stated no religion and of those reporting other religions, the largest group is Muslim. The proportion of the population stating they have no qualifications is much lower than for those in the other two wards. There was a higher proportion of the population reporting that they were economically active than in the other two wards. Of the economically active, there is a high proportion who are managers and senior officials or in professional occupations. There is a very high proportion of owner occupied households but the proportion in housing rented from the local authority is similar to that in Crossland. This ward had the lowest proportion of lone parent households of the three wards and a very high proportion of married couples.

In comparing the age structure of the three Wards, there are some significant differences with implications for the need for services to support parents with young children. Tinbury has the highest proportion of the population aged between 0 to 14 years followed by Shaw and then Crossland.

APPENDIX 2: INFORMATION LEAFLET FOR PARENTS

MAKING A DIFFERENCE? TRANSFORMING CHILDCARE POLICIES FOR MOTHERS, FATHERS AND CHILDREN IN WALES.

PROJECT SUMMARY

WHAT IS THE RESEARCH ABOUT?

I am carrying out research into how childcare services and related facilities can best support the needs of mothers, fathers and children in the local area. This involves three main stages:

(1) Finding out about the main sources of support for children and parents in the local area.

(2) Interviews with mothers, fathers and extended family involved in care of children about their needs, use of services and facilities and wishes for further support.

(3) Discussions with people involved in the delivery of childcare and other services for children in Swansea and within the Welsh Assembly Government.

WHAT WILL THE INTERVIEW INVOLVE?

The interview will take about an hour or more, depending on how much you want to say in response to my questions. I would like to tape record our conversation and guarantee that your comments will be treated in confidence. No individual will be identified at any stage of the research. If there are questions that you would prefer not to answer or you wish to end the interview at any stage, that will not be a problem.

RESEARCH OUTCOMES

I am carrying out the research in connection with my studies as a full-time postgraduate student in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at the University of Wales Swansea. A short research report will be prepared in order to provide feedback to participants and others with an interest in childcare policy and provision and the delivery of services for children. As a mother with two sons, aged eight and three, I have a personal interest in how parents manage childcare and how the information and services available to them could be improved. Your willingness to share your views will be greatly appreciated.

CONTACT

If you have any questions about this project or would like to contribute any information please do not hesitate to get in touch with me in writing or by e-mail. Please see overleaf for details.

CONTACT DETAILS

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School of Social Sciences and International Development
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MUMS, DADS AND GRANDPARENTS!! ARE YOU INVOLVED IN THE REGULAR CARE OF ONE OR MORE CHILDREN UNDER ELEVEN YEARS OLD?

If you are, I wonder if you would be willing to spend some time talking with me in connection with my research project? I am interested in how mothers, fathers and wider family organise childcare, how it fits in with their other responsibilities, which services they use and what further support, if any, they would like to be available.

The interview would be completely confidential and would be arranged at a time and place that is convenient to you.

If you are interested in taking part in the research or would like to discuss this further please complete the slip below. Please note that there will be no pressure to be involved should you change your mind after talking with me. A more detailed outline of the project is attached.

Wendy Ball
Research Student

Yes, I am willing to be contacted in connection with the 'Making a Difference?' project.

Name:

Telephone Number:

Please return this form to ..... and I will contact you shortly.

APPENDIX 3: DETAILS OF SAMPLE OF MOTHERS, FATHERS AND GRANDPARENTS.

SAMPLE OF MOTHERS, FATHERS AND GRANDPARENTS.

Each participant was asked to provide information in relation to the following:

- Age
- Marital Status
- Ethnic Origin (Defined by the Interviewee*)
- Employment Status (a) own; (b) partner, if applicable.
- Number of children
- Age of children

All names are pseudonyms and the gender of the children has been concealed to aid anonymity.

*Interviewees were given a free choice regarding how they defined their ethnic origin. Some chose to refer to their skin colour as well as their country of birth and/or nationality whilst others defined themselves only in relation to their country of birth and/or nationality.

PARENTS LIVING IN SHAW

Becky (39, white Welsh)

Married; working part-time as a childminder and other occasional part-time work. On a career break from a professional job in the Civil Service; husband is an engineer; three children aged 2, 4 and 9 years.

Janet (45, white Welsh)

Separated from children's father; living with new partner; recently moved from part-time, casual to a full-time position in the same business and working towards her qualification in the trade; partner works in the same profession but for a different firm; has four children aged 25, 23, 18 and 8 years and a 4 year old grandchild.

Greta (39, white European)

Married; full-time mature student; husband is a University researcher; three children aged 16, 11 and 8 years.

Gail (39 years, white Welsh)

Married; part-time cashier for a supermarket; previously commuted to another City as a manager for a Utility Company but gave up after birth of second child; husband is a skilled manual worker for a Local Authority; two children aged 3 and 8 years.

Kelly (37, white English)

Married; part-time health worker in hospital; husband is a doctor; two children aged 7 and 4 years.

Lowri (33, white Welsh)

Separated from husband; full time manager in a financial company; two children aged 7 and 6 years.

Kenneth (52, white Welsh)

Living with partner; senior manager in Higher Education; partner is a lecturer; four children aged 13, 11, 7 and 15 months.

Malcolm (32, white English)

Married; manager in FE College; wife is a University lecturer; one child aged 5 years.

- **Mavis (Grandmother) (63, white English)**

Married; retired from school teaching but involved in voluntary work with children; husband is self-employed; three adult children aged 38, 32 and 28; three grandchildren and one of them, aged 2 years, was living with her full-time because her mother (Mavis' daughter) was unwell.

PARENTS LIVING IN CROSSLAND

Emma (34, white Welsh)

Lone parent; works part-time in clerical post in Higher Education; two children aged 8 and 6 years.

Hameeda (28, Bangladeshi)

Married; works full-time as a Community Worker; husband is a chef; one child aged 15 months.

Diane (33, white Welsh)

Single parent with shared care arrangement with former partner; separation is recent; part-time manager of retail outlet; has a degree and wants to return to study; one child aged 3 years.

Sadiah (29, Bangladeshi)

Married; described herself as a housewife and had previously been a factory worker prior to motherhood; husband is a waiter; four children aged 9,7,5 and 3 years.

Tracey (33, white Welsh)

Married; no longer working following disability and had previously been a nanny; husband works full-time in voluntary sector; two children aged 5 and 3 years.

Rashida (27, Bengali)

Married; gave up work when she became pregnant; had been a Customer Services Advisor; husband works in a local restaurant; one child aged 3 years and pregnant with a second child.

Zeena (28, Welsh Bangladeshi)

Married; living with her parents and siblings; part-time community worker; one child aged 6 years.

Farah (30, British Bangladeshi)

Married; part-time learning support assistant; husband not working; two children aged 3 and 2 years.

Sunita (27, Bangladeshi)

Married; gave up work as a learning support assistant when she found she was pregnant; has a degree; husband works full-time as a chef; twins aged 4 years.

Jackie (Grandmother, 55 years, white Welsh)

Married; no longer working; has two adult daughters and three grandchildren aged 8, 6 and 3 years. One daughter lives at home with her child following a broken relationship.

Aalam (33, Bangladeshi)

Married; part-time student and voluntary worker; wife is not in paid work; three children aged 11, 8 and 4 years.

PARENTS LIVING IN TINBURY

Natalie (44, white European)

Divorced- child has occasional contact with father; part-time teacher; one child aged 7 years.

Danielle (28, white European)

Separated; part-time work with 2 jobs- teacher and skilled craft worker; one child aged 7 years.

Christine (29, white Welsh)

Married; working part-time as care worker and also a part-time student; husband was described as a 'housedad'; three children aged 7, 5 and 3 years.

Stella (35, white Welsh)

Married; part-time nurse working night shifts; husband is a manual worker; one child aged 4.

Sheila (29, white Welsh)

Married; teacher; husband is Civil Servant; one child aged 3 years.

Margaret (33, white Welsh)

Married; full-time childminder; husband is a long distance driver; two children aged 9 and 3 years.

Gillian (45, white Welsh)

Married; in transition from Civil Service to Local Authority employment as administrative assistant- part-time; husband works as Civil Servant; one child aged 4 years

Joy (22, white Welsh/Irish)

Married; not in paid work; husband is self-employed manual worker; one child aged 19 months.

Sally (23, white Welsh)

Lone parent; not in paid work due to health problems but works as volunteer in Day Centre; planning to go to College; one child aged 18 months.

Bronwen (21, white Welsh)

Lone parent having separated from partner very recently; part-time Customer Services representative and part-time degree student; one child aged 18 months.

Nursery Mothers

Four mothers were interviewed, all in the same friendship group and using the same nursery. There was not sufficient time to record all their individual details. All were white Welsh:

Jane- two children aged 13 years and 3 years.

Liz- two children aged 4 years and 8 years.

Brenda- two children aged 10 years and 4 years.

Yvonne- one child aged 3 years and expecting a baby.

Sure Start Dads Group and Individual Interviews

Patrick (37, white English)

Lone parent; not in paid work; three children aged 10, 6 and 2 years.

Michael (23, white Welsh)

Lone parent; works in a night club; lives with his own mother who provides support; two children aged 16 months and 5 months.

Leo (38, Welsh/ Argentinian)

Separated with contact order to see his children who live with their mother; Security Officer; two children aged 4 and 3 years.

APPENDIX 4: CARING FOR CHILDREN INTERVIEW GUIDE

CARING FOR CHILDREN INTERVIEW GUIDE

Pre-amble:

I am a postgraduate research student in the Department of Sociology, University of Wales, Swansea. I am carrying out research into how parents manage childcare and their perspectives on the support that is available to them. I have two sons, aged eight and three and so I have a personal interest in this topic and in finding out about local services for parents and children. The information that is collected will form the basis of a report and all participants will receive a copy of this.

I would like to thank you for agreeing to share your views with me. Your comments will be treated in confidence and steps will be taken to ensure no individual will be identified at any stage of the research. If there are questions that you would prefer not to answer or you feel you wish to end the interview at any stage then please let me know.

****

ABOUT YOU AND YOUR FAMILY

Name:

Age:

Are you involved in any work/ training/ education?:

Ethnic origin: ask respondent to provide own definition.

Children: ask for details of gender, age, whether children live with them.

Partner: **Occupation:**

Other members of the family living at home:

CARING FOR CHILDREN: WHAT DOES IT INVOLVE AND WHO DOES IT?

I am interested in the routines that parents have for caring for their children and how this fits in to other things they have to do such as going to work, studying, having leisure time and so on. Can I start by talking with you about how looking after your child/ren has effected your life:

What were you doing before the birth of your (first) child?

Did this change as a result of having children?

Are you working and/or in education at the moment? Ask for further details about type of work/course; hours; how long doing this where relevant.

Could you describe what a typical day would involve? (Probe: check whether there is a common pattern throughout the week or variability, check if there is a different routine in school holidays, where there are school age children) See timesheet in appendix.

Check who does what? Ask specifically about role of partner (if appropriate), extended family and friends.

Check for following aspects of care (and who decides what needs to be done) (hand over card):

- Toileting/Nappies (if appropriate)
- Washing and Dressing
- Shopping
- Cooking
- Feeding
- Washing clothes
- Ironing
- Cleaning
- Tidying Up
- Playing with children at home
- Leisure activities for children outside home
- Taking/ Collecting From Childcare/Early Years Provider/School
- Taking/ Collecting from After-School Activities
- Helping With Homework
- Looking after child/ren when unwell
- Seeing health visitor/ nurse/ doctor
- Visits to school/ attend school activities
- Managing child behaviour

- Financial management/paying bills etc
- Home Maintenance
- Gardening
- Care of wider family/ elderly parents
- Other

Why do you organize childcare in this way? (Probe: explore how far this is based on choice, moral codes, practical circumstances)

What do you most enjoy?

Is there anything that you do not enjoy?

Is there anything that you would like to change about the routines that you have described? (Prompt- if changes are desired, pursue perceptions of constraints involved; if entirely satisfied with these routines, ask about what it is that makes them work so well)

Have your routines changed during the period since the birth of your (first) child?

Do you ever discuss how you share childcare and housework with your partner (if applicable), family or friends? (i.e checking if this is up for negotiation, how far taken for granted)

Do you feel your way of managing the care of the children is typical of families with young children now? If not, what is different about your arrangements?

Do you feel your decisions over childcare/ work/ housework have been influenced by your views on what women/ men can/should do?

Do you think women and men are able to share childcare equally, if they choose to do so? Would this be desirable?

USING AND CHOOSING EARLY YEARS AND CHILDCARE PROVISION

So far we have discussed who is involved in the care of your children on an informal basis. I am also interested in the use that parents make of formal sources of care:

Do you make use of any formal childcare or early years education facilities? (e.g childminder, playgroup, day nursery, creche, after-school club, holiday play-schemes)

What are your reasons for choosing this particular facility?

How long have you been using the facility?

When do you use the facility?

Are you satisfied with the service that is provided?

Do you believe there is sufficient choice for parents who need to make use of formal childcare provision?

Where would you go to get information about childcare facilities?

WORK, EDUCATION AND CHILDCARE

I would now like to discuss how childcare effects your decisions about work and /or education/training in more detail:

How far are your circumstances in work/education/training or being out of work/education/training influenced by your responsibilities at home?

If relevant:

What is it like for you in meeting the needs of your job/course and in looking after your children?

What do you like about these arrangements? What is difficult?

Is your employer/ education provider supportive of the needs of parents?

Are you satisfied with your current situation? Is there anything you would like to change?

All parents:

Are you aware of any ways in which employers and education/training bodies try to support the needs of parents?

The Government has introduced a variety of initiatives to encourage parents who are in receipt of benefits to return to paid work. What are your views on this strategy? Has this influenced own decisions about work?

PERSPECTIVES ON POLICY AND SERVICES FOR PARENTS AND CHILDREN

What do you see as the main services and facilities for parents and young children in Swansea/ in local area?

Which of these do you use?

Do you feel that this is a good place to live for families with young children?

Are there any ways in which services and facilities could be improved?

Do you think that policy-makers and service providers are aware of the needs of parents and children?

Can you think of any specific initiatives that have been introduced to help parents (if not mentioned, ask about family-friendly employment, tax credits, Wales childcare action plan, Swansea Early Years and Childcare Partnership)

Do you feel that there is enough opportunity for parents with young children to influence the policies that effect them?

Finally, are there any other ways in which support and facilities for parents with young children could be improved?

END OF INTERVIEW

Thank you for your time. Would you like to receive a copy of the project report? If so, please let me know where I should send this:

Do you have any friends with young children who would be interested in taking part in this research?

If applicable: later in the research I am hoping to interview some dads and wider family involved in the care of children, would your partner/husband/relative be interested in taking part in this research?

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE APPENDIX: CARING FOR CHILDREN- WHAT DID YOU DO YESTERDAY? A RECORD OF THE MAIN ACTIVITIES CARRIED OUT WITH/FOR CHILD/REN.

Note: This should include a record of activities carried out or shared by others, use of formal and informal support, use of facilities, and how this fits into the participant's other commitments such as paid or voluntary work, education/training, care for others, domestic duties and leisure pursuits.

A TYPICAL DAY

APPENDIX 5: SAMPLE OF POLICY ACTORS

SAMPLE OF POLICY ACTORS

REGIONAL LEVEL

Mike Davies, Advisor, National Assembly for Wales.

Keith Hall, Assembly Member, National Assembly for Wales.

Paul Waters, Officer, Children's Organisation.

Alison Connor, Officer, Gender Equality Body One.

Liz Spencer, Officer, Gender Equality Body Two.

Lesley Thomas, Officer, Welsh Public Services Organisation.

City and County of Swansea

Sarah Wilson, Voluntary Sector Officer, member of Swansea EYDCP.

Debra Mason, Officer, City and County of Swansea, member of Swansea EYDCP.

Rita Daniels, Officer, City and County of Swansea, member of Swansea EYDCP.

Nicholas Peters, Senior Officer, City and County of Swansea.

Chris Coleman, Senior Officer, City and County of Swansea.

Susan Hall, Officer, Voluntary Organisation, member of Swansea EYDCP.

Erica Bell, Sure Start Officer, City and County of Swansea.

Narinder Begum, Community Worker for Sure Start.

APPENDIX 6: POLICY ACTORS' INTERVIEW THEMES

POLICY-MAKERS/ PRACTITIONERS: INTERVIEW THEMES

Interviews will be semi-structured and tape-recorded. The following themes will provide a basis for developing questions:

- Personal information, nature of involvement/ interest in childcare policy;
- Views on what childcare policy can and should deliver;
- Perspectives on the welfare-to-work agenda as a driver of childcare policy;
- Awareness of key gaps in provision;
- Discussion of childcare policy as a mechanism to deliver gender equality;
- Views on location of childcare as part of a range of services for children and young people, perspectives on framing policy as a children's rights issue;
- Contact with local communities and parents- how can participation and involvement be encouraged;
- Views on the role played by Welsh Assembly Government in shaping childcare policy to meet needs of Welsh communities;
- Views on delivery of policy through partnership working- benefits, problems?
- Issues emerging from parent interviews (see list)

ISSUES EMERGING FROM PARENT INTERVIEWS

- lack of parental knowledge about policies and services;
- persistence of gendered division of labour in care of children;
- moral imperatives to care for children and not use formal childcare;
- concerns over safety of children;
- closure of leisure centre as major loss;
- tensions between childcare for working parents and half-day nursery provision;
- waiting lists for after school clubs and closure at one school;
- lack of affordable respite childcare facilities for non-working and low income parents;
- poor public transport;
- cost of leisure facilities for low-income parents.

OTHER ISSUES TO EMERGE FROM CASE STUDIES

- Problems in ensuring the sustainability of grant funded projects.
- Emergence of distinct markets in childcare in each area seems to be encouraged by National Childcare Strategy- leaves major gaps in each area.

LIST OF INTERVIEW THEMES

- **WELSH ASSEMBLY**

  Significance of devolution

  Key achievements

  Limits to devolution

  Concerns and criticism of Assembly policies, structures...

  Meeting needs of Welsh Communities

- **POLICY FRAMES**

  Connecting frames

  Economic/ employment/childcare as route to paid work

  Child-centred/ Meeting the needs of the child

  Tackling child poverty and disadvantage

  Promoting equal opportunity/ gender equality

  Respecting parental choice

  Conflicting frames

- **CHILDCARE PROVISION/ WHO IS IT FOR/ WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT/ WHAT KIND OF PROVISION DOES THAT ENCOURAGE?**

  Childcare for working parents

  Childcare for child development/ education

  Childcare as support and respite for parents

  Childcare as a right for all parents and children

- **PARENTAL CHOICE AND PREFERENCES**

  Support for extending choice

  Sensitivity to parental preferences (e.g use of informal care)

  Response to themes from parent interviews

- **PARTNERSHIPS (REGIONAL AND LOCAL) AND POLICY PROCESS**

  The Policy Process: Achievements and challenges of partnership working

  Assembly and Regional partnerships; CYP Partnerships; Swansea EYDCP

- **POLICY DELIVERY-ACHIEVEMENTS AND OBSTACLES**

- **COMMUNICATION, CONSULTATION AND INFORMATION**

- **CASE STUDY AREAS AND SERVICES FOR PARENTS AND CHILDREN**

- **LOOPHOLES, GAPS AND TENSIONS IN POLICY AND PROVISION**

- **SOCIAL JUSTICE AND DIVERSITY**

APPENDIX 7:

TEMPLATE FOR ANALYSIS OF WRITTEN AND VERBAL EVIDENCE TO WELSH AFFAIRS SELECT COMMITTEE 1999

TEMPLATE FOR ANALYSIS OF WRITTEN AND VERBAL EVIDENCE.

- **NAME**

  Name of organisation.

- **ROLE**

  Role of organisation/ Whose interests are represented?

- **POLITICAL LOCATION**

  Relationship to 'political opportunity structure' (Ball and Charles, 2006)

  Location in local and/or national state apparatus?

  Is prime focus economic, political or welfare based interests?

  Is there any critique of the political process?

- **FRAMING OF ISSUE/ DISCOURSE**

  Issues placed on agenda.

  How does the organisation 'frame' the issue of childcare.

  Childhood discourse: provision, protection or participation.

  Gender discourse: neutral/ implicit/ explicit; equal opportunities/ feminist (liberal/ radical).

  Social class discourse: neutral/ implicit/explicit; key concepts e.g social exclusion, poverty.

- **DEMANDS**

  Pressure for resources/ meeting needs of members/ reframing of policy/ requests for political incorporation.

- **RESPONSES OF SELECT COMMITTEE**

  Is there evidence of masculinized politics, or efforts to 'deny the relevance of gender' (Lovenduski and Randall, 1993: 172)

  How are demands 'processed' by the Select Committee?

  This will be addressed in those cases where the response seems especially illuminating.

APPENDIX 8:

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION FOR BOX 10.

MANAGING CHILDCARE THROUGH FORMAL AND INFORMAL SUPPORT.

*1. **No informal support/ do use formal childcare.***

Kelly (Shaw)- used wide variety of providers. Now uses after-school club and private kids camp.

Lowri (Shaw)- uses after-school club and day nursery for school holidays.

Kenneth (Shaw)- uses after-school club and private day nursery.

Malcolm (Shaw)- uses after-school club.

Sally (Tinbury)- although her mother will babysit occasionally she is not available on a regular basis. She uses a creche to allow her to do voluntary work and for respite.

*2. **No informal support/ do not use formal childcare.***

Becky (Shaw)- chooses to be home full-time doing some childminding. Does send younger children to a pre-school playgroup.

Greta (Shaw)- children are all in school and covers out of school care in partnership with her husband. Will allow eldest child to do some babysitting.

Gail (Shaw)- has rearranged her work so that she can fit round her husband's working day and the needs of her children. Sends youngest child to half-day nursery.

Rashida (Crossland)- does not believe in using formal childcare and is at home full-time. Has no family that she feels give support and feels isolated.

Farah (Crossland)- had tried using formal childcare but could not afford to continue. Her family was not in a position to help with regular childcare so she is very stressed balancing work and care. Has some limited help through a friend who will collect her child from nursery but it causes problems when she is not able to do this. She has been placed in this category because overall she seems to be lacking in informal support.

Stella (Tinbury)- arranges her working hours so that she does not need to use formal childcare. Has no informal support. Sends her child to half-day nursery.

Margaret (Tinbury)- works as a childminder but would not wish to use formal childcare herself. Wanted a job that would enable her to be with her own children. Has no informal support.

*3. **Informal support/ do use formal childcare.***

Janet (Shaw)- uses childminder and after-school club but has limited informal support from her adult children to cover for crises such as sickness and to collect from an after-school club that closes before she gets back from work.

Emma (Crossland)- uses after-school club and a private babysitter but relies on father and mother-in-law in emergencies.

Diane (Crossland)- uses private day nursery but has support from her mother to cover for illness.

Tracey (Crossland)- has support from a childminder so that she can take her child to school with assistance for her disability. However, is supported on a daily basis by her mother.

Natalie (Tinbury)- uses an after-school club as she works part-time. She has a reciprocal arrangement with her friend, Danielle, for collecting their children from school. She nevertheless suggested that she felt vulnerable about having no family living in Wales and suggested it is harder to ask friends for help.

Danielle (Tinbury/Shaw border)- uses an after-school club as she works part-time. She reciprocates with Natalie in the collection of their children from school. Like Natalie, she valued this arrangement but suggested that it was not the same as having family that could be relied on. She was clear that formal childcare left some gaps and she relied on the goodwill of friends to cover these gaps.

Christine (Tinbury)- she has a place at creche paid for by her college for her youngest child. Her husband is at home full-time and her parents will babysit but cannot provide support during the day.

Gillian (Tinburyl/Shaw border)- uses a creche while she works but also gets support of her husband's parents for babysitting and a friend will look after her child when she works on a Saturday and the creche is closed.

Bronwen (Tinbury)- uses a creche and a babysitter to cover for work and study. Her father will cover for some of the gaps including the requirement that she works on a Saturday. She also has a reciprocal arrangement with another local lone parent who works for the same Company and both mothers are reliant on the Company respecting this in the allocation of their shifts.

Mavis (Shaw)- grandmother providing informal support during a crisis but uses private day nursery for respite.

4. Informal support/ do not use formal childcare.

Hameeda (Crossland)- shares care with her husband but limited informal support from husband's family for times when both parents' working hours clash.

Sadiah (Crossland)- is at home full-time and has some relief when she visits her mother in London.

Zeena (Crossland)- does not believe in the use of formal childcare. Is able to work because she has an extended family willing to care for her child.

Jackie (Crossland)- is a grandmother who provides the informal support to enable her two daughters to work.

Aalam (Crossland)- there is no need to use formal childcare as he is studying and his wife is home full-time. However, he appreciated the support available within his extended family in entertaining the children to allow them some 'time out'.

Sunita (Crossland)- has chosen not to work as she has twins and feels this is enough to cope with. However, she also has a lot of support from her mother and other family.

Sheila (works in Tinbury)- has considerable informal support from mother and mother-in-law and was clear that she would not be prepared to use formal childcare. However, she is willing to make use of pre-school education and nursery provision for her child.

Joy (Tinbury)- does not wish to work while her child is young. Has felt depressed and isolated but has found support from local Family Centre invaluable. She has various family members who will babysit and provide company. Is happy to leave her child in the creche at the Family Centre.

Nursery mothers (Tinbury)- do not believe in the use of formal childcare but support each other in looking after the children. All send their children to the local state nursery.

N.B Sure Start fathers varied in their personal circumstances and are not included in this table- Michael was sole carer for his daughters but relied on his mother to babysit so that he could work. Patrick was also a sole carer lacking any family support but getting help through Sure Start.

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ENDNOTES

[i] See Nancy Hartsock (1983) 'The Feminist Standpoint: Developing the Ground for a Specifically Feminist Historical Materialism' in S.Harding and M.Hintikka (eds) *Discovering Reality: Feminist Perspectives on Epistemology, Metaphysics, Methodology and Philosophy of Science.* Dordrecht: Reidel/ Kluwer. Cited in Hartsock (1997).

[ii] Specific examples of difficulties that I expected to be raised included balancing paid work and care, the pressures of being with young children, the demands made by schools on parents.

[iii] Helga Nowotny (1981) 'Women in public life in Austria', in C.Fuchs Epstein and R.Laub Coser (eds) *Access to Power. Cross National Studies of Women and Elites.* London: Sage. Cited in Reay (2000; 2005).

[iv] Patricia Allatt (1993) 'Becoming privileged: the role of family process', in I.Bates and G.Riseborough (eds) *Youth and Inequality.* Buckingham: Open University Press. Cited in Reay (2000; 2005).

[v] Helga Nowotny (1981) 'Women in public life in Austria', in C.Fuchs Epstein and R.Laub Coser (eds) *Access to Power. Cross National Studies of Women and Elites.* London: Sage. Cited in Allatt (1993).

[vi] Although my sample included some fathers and grandparents I refer to mothers here as the research was principally concerned with exploring childcare from the standpoint of mothers.

[vii] Where I have disclosed personal information relating to my relationship with my husband I have sought his consent.

[viii] The web sites included those relating to national, regional and local government alongside relevant public, private and voluntary sector bodies such as Chwarae Teg (Fair Play), the Equal Opportunities Commission in Wales, Children in Wales, the Welsh Local Government Association and the Welsh Development Agency.

[ix] E.Goffman (1974) *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of the Experience.* New York: Harper Colophon. Cited in Benford and Snow (2000).

[x] The Communities First programme is a Welsh Assembly initiative to tackle poverty and social disadvantage (WAG, 2002h).

[xi] This age was selected as a cut off point because it represents the end of primary schooling and designates an age group for which the childcare needs of parents are likely to be most pronounced.

[xii] ChildcareLink is a helpline and web site (www.childcarelink.gov.uk/). that provides information on national and local childcare services. It was launched by the

Government as part of the National Childcare Strategy in December 1999. It is funded by the DfEE and the Scottish Executive and offers detailed information on childcare and early years for all English and Scottish local authorities. However, the Welsh National Assembly decided not to participate in this initiative (e-mail communication with Welsh Assembly Government, 12/7/05) but has since agreed to add e-mail addresses and hyperlinks to the site with information about local Children's Information Services in Wales.

[xiii] Bassin, D., Honey, M. and Kaplan, M.M. (eds) (1994) *Representations of Motherhood.* Yale University Press. New Haven and London: 3 cited in Turney (2000: 47).

[xiv] A.Borchorst (1990) 'Political motherhood and child care policies: a comparative approach to Britain and Scandinavia', in C.Ungerson (ed.) *Gender and Caring: Work and Welfare in Britain and Scandinavia.* New York: Simon and Schuster. Cited in Windebank (1999).

[xv] These are the chapter headings provided in *Supporting Families* (Home Office, 1998).

[xvi] The Box does not include all the initiatives proposed in the consultation paper but is based on a selection for the point of illustration.

[xvii] Please refer to the following web sites for information on parents' rights at work: www.dti.gov.uk/ ; www.womenandequalityunit.gov.uk/.

[xviii] The *Every Child Matters* Green Paper (DfES, 2003) introduced policies and proposals for England only with the exception of certain proposals relating to non-devolved responsibilities. The Welsh Assembly Government was able to determine which proposals they wished to adopt but within the legislative framework subsequently introduced by the Children Act 2004, Part Three, Children's Services in Wales.

[xix] Information is available on www.womenandequalityunit.gov.uk

[xx] It should be noted that the definition of childcare utilised in this study is rather narrow. Sullivan defines child care as 'times in which the *main* activity was reported as child related (i.e. including feeding of children, washing children, playing with children, and helping children with homework)' (2000: 454). This definition does not account for the entire labour involved in parenting, nor does it recognise that responsibility for children's safety and well being will continue whilst parents are completing other tasks. The problem of definition helps to explain why the number of minutes per day spent in childcare for all parents seems to be peculiarly low and does call into question the validity of these data.

[xxi] The National Assembly for Wales has 60 elected members and has legislative powers in devolved areas. The National Assembly has delegated its executive powers to the Welsh Assembly Government made up of nine Cabinet Ministers and led by

the First Minister. Reference will be made simply to "the Assembly" throughout the thesis unless the distinction between the legislature and the executive is relevant.

[xxii] www.wales.gov.uk

[xxiii] This can be accessed via the web link www.BetterWales.com. This first strategic plan is now an archived document and has been replaced by WAG (2003) *Wales: A Better Country. The Strategic Agenda of the Welsh Assembly Government.* Cardiff: National Assembly for Wales.

[xxiv] www.gov.uk/acts/en2004

[xxv] www.everychildmatters.gov.uk

[xxvi] The Assembly's Core Aims for Children and Young People are to ensure children and young people:

- have a flying start in life and the best possible basis for their future growth and development
- have access to a comprehensive range of education, training and learning opportunities, including acquisition of essential personal and social skills
- enjoy the best possible physical and mental, social and emotional health, including freedom from abuse, victimisation and exploitation
- have access to play, leisure, sporting and cultural activities
- are listened to, treated with respect, and are able to have their race and cultural identity recognised
- have a safe home and a community that supports physical and emotional wellbeing
- are not disadvantaged by child poverty

(WAG, 2004b: 1)

[xxvii] The five outcomes identified in *Every Child Matters* and subsequently the Children Act 2004 are to enable children to:

- Be healthy
- Stay safe
- Enjoy and achieve
- Make a positive contribution
- Achieve economic well-being

These outcomes are to be progressed through the duty of each children's authority in England and Wales to improve the well-being of children in their area.

[xxviii] Please note that where I give publication dates for Assembly documents by month/ year that this is the date printed inside the hard copy. I have found that the date for publication for some of these documents recorded on www.wales.gov.uk or cited in subsequent documents may not always correspond. In addition some of the policy documents available on the web site do not have a date recorded.

[xxix] This Box does not provide an exhaustive summary of all policy developments relating to children and young people. It is an indication of some of the key landmarks and focuses on areas of relevance to the delivery of childcare.

[xxx] The other four areas of priority are 'health promotion', 'play, leisure and enrichment', 'empowerment, participation and active citizenship' and 'training' (WAG, 2004c).

[xxxi] The Young People's Partnerships have a statutory basis in the Learning and Skills Act 2000. Whilst the Framework Planning Guidance was advisory, local authorities had to comply to receive Cymorth funds.

[xxxii] Section 118A (3) (4) of School Standards and Framework Act 1998 as amended by Section 149 of the Education Act 2002.

[xxxiii] Summarised from www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2004/40031—d.htm .

[xxxiv] This Box should be read alongside Box 6 presented in the previous section.

[xxxv] Where an organisation covers more than one category it is identified more than once.

[xxxvi] The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, Wales.

[xxxvii] Standing Conference of Voluntary Organisations for People with a Learning Disability in Wales.

[xxxviii] Association of Welsh-Medium Nursery Schools and Playgroups.

[xxxix] The Select Committee put forward 46 proposals in total. Those selected for comment are those with specific relevance to the research.

[xl] It should be noted that my comments are confined to the situation prevailing during the period of my fieldwork. It is possible that things may change with a revised devolution settlement for Wales in the future.

[xli] The MEWN Project for Children and Families, for example, is defined as a non-geographic community of need where childcare provision is a primary focus (City and County of Swansea, 2003e).

[xlii] These areas include Crossland and Tinbury, two of the three case study areas for my research.

[xliii] I also encountered some degree of resistance to collaboration in this research from certain Officers within the City and County of Swansea. Some key Officers refused to participate altogether despite my offer of sharing data from the parent interviews that was relevant to their role.

[xliv] This can be accessed via the link www.childcarelink.gov.uk.

[xlv] Section 118A(3) of the 1998 School Standards and Framework Act (as amended by the Education Act 2002).

[xlvi] I share all domestic tasks with my husband but I take main responsibility for the organisation of education, play and friendships. I am aware that I am conforming to expectations of the 'sensitive/ intensive' mother in this context.

[xlvii] I recall being astounded when my health visitor asked me to go through the various activities that I conducted with my eldest son at his check-up when he was two years old. She prompted me to ensure that I was reading with him, taking him to parent and toddler groups, encouraging him to paint and draw. I was also advised that in playing with him that I should be using techniques to improve his levels of concentration! In my view, this check-up was about evaluating my mothering skills and ensuring my son's readiness for school (albeit three years before the legal starting age for school) whilst framed as an assessment of my son's health and well being. Yet my husband was not asked to account for his fathering skills despite the fact that at this point I was combining three part-time teaching posts whilst he cared for our son full-time. Hence, when I read Diane's account of being the constantly creative mother, behind the joy, I see the relations of ruling, the mediations of textual reality described by Dorothy Smith and promoted by professionals such as my health visitor.

[xlviii] This illustrated the problem that information on childcare provision may rapidly become out of date so that the lists provided by the Children's Information Service may be inaccurate.

[xlix] A wrap-around facility offers childcare that covers the gaps of time left by educational services. Most free nursery places in Swansea are for morning or afternoon sessions only and are rarely suitable for parents looking for childcare while they are in paid work. A wrap-around facility helps to resolve this by giving parents the option of combining free nursery education with a linked childcare facility. Most take the form of lunch clubs and playgroups offered on the same site as the nursery. Some facilities are subsidised and others charge a fee but they are generally offered at a lower cost than services provided by the private childcare market.

[l] Since the fieldwork was completed the City and County of Swansea have announced plans to close this facility despite public opposition.

[li] This school had approached Assembly Ministers with regard to this problem. It seems likely that the announcement of targetted funding through *Flying Start* (WAG, 2005f) has been designed to address problems exemplified in this case. Entitlement to this funding will be based on the characteristics of the school population rather than the post- code address.

[lii] This mother works in Tinbury but lives outside Swansea.

[liii] This is the situation that I found myself in following parenthood. My husband and I tried to move from the position where one of us worked full-time and the other worked part-time over the weekend to both of us working and using formal childcare on a part-time basis. We had no informal support from family. We found that we were only able to maintain this for a few months before agreeing that it was costing us more to pay for childcare than we were gaining from my husband's earnings at work. We were facing considerable difficulties with my husband's employer because, as a result of being in a busy nursery, our son was falling sick on average one week out of every three. This meant my husband had to take unpaid time off work regularly and at short notice to the concern of his employer whilst we were still liable for paying fees at the nursery when our son was absent. The costs and the stress involved were just not worth it.

[liv] This information has been drawn from census data provided in City and County of Swansea (2003a; 2003b; 2003c). The areas have each been assigned a pseudonym.